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The saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCT. 50¢

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

In this issue

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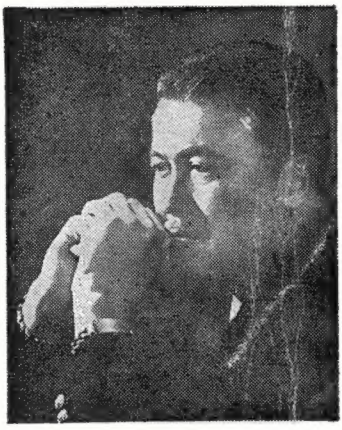
death bid

A New Story by WENZELL BROWN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY WRITING



Cities, like their inhabitants, can be jealous of their reputations, sensitive to slander, and quick to defend themselves against disparagement. No city in America, and perhaps in the whole world, can have had more problems in this respect than Chicago.

Proud as it may be of its commerce and industry, its museums and cultural activities, it is not much better off than Sodom and Gomorrah, which may have boasted similar amenities in their time which nobody remembers, except that Chicago is still in business. But during Prohibition, Chicago had the misfortune to become the fief of Al Capone, who became the national and international apotheosis of gangsterism in its most publicized form, and none of its other achievements is likely to remove that smear in our time. There have been (and always were) other overlords of the underworld, and other cities taken over by crime and corruption; but once a symbol has been established there is not much you can do to de-symbolize it. And Chicago is doomed to live with the fact that in every corner of the globe that has ever heard of its existence, "Chicago-gangster" is an automatically hyphenated corollary.

Sodom and Gomorrah were, perhaps, lucky to be totally destroyed. At least they were not faced with the task of rehabilitating themselves, and installing a Reform Administration that would elect a Chamber of Commerce that would appoint a Public Relations Adviser who would be stuck with the job of selling a new Popular Image in which they were simple pastoral communities dedicated to handicrafts and folk-dancing.

However, I was obliged to wonder how seriously Chicago may be applying itself to its task when I recently came upon an Associated Press dispatch datelined from there and gravely quoting one of the town's own civic employees. To quote it as verbatim as my newspaper carried it:

> An outburst of subway beatings and robberies has alarmed Chicago's commuters, but public transportation officials say "it's not as bad as it seems."
>
> The subway situation leaped into prominence Jan. 7 when Noble W. Lee, a state legislater, was beaten and robbed by three toughs as 20 other passengers watched without moving. Lee escaped serious injury.
>
> Last weekend two more incidents of violence were reported, including the mauling of a Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) policeman.
>
> "As far as we're concerned, it's not as bad as it seems," Andrew Dinnella, assistant superintendent of the 92-man CTA police force, said.
>
> Dinnella said there were 300 beatings and assaults on public transportation vehicles and trains last year, most of them at night. A conductor died as a result of one of the attacks. About 200 persons were arrested.
>
> "It's no more dangerous to ride the subway than it is to walk down the street," Dinnella said. "We've had muggings for years on the streets. *I don't think there's anything for the public to be alarmed about.*" My italics.

Leon Charleus

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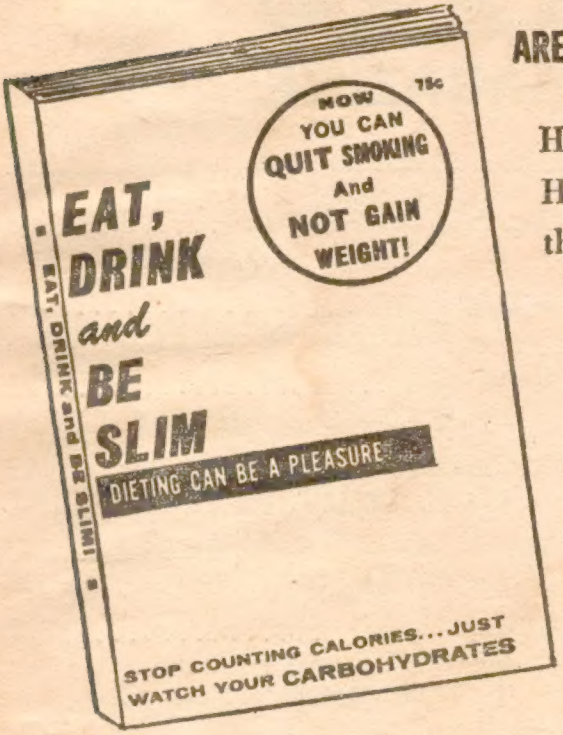

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the higher finance

by Leslie Charteris

I

ONE DAY some literary faker with more time to waste than I have may write a precious monograph about Doors. He will point out that Doors are both entrances and exits, and draw pseudo-philosophical conclusions about Life and Death. He will drag in the Door which American diplomats always insist on keeping Open, except when they are inside. He may turn aside to toy fancifully with the Door-consciousness of Wolves. He will almost inevitably mention some famous Doors; such as the Great Door of the cathedral of Poillissy-sur-Loire, on which Voltaire scribbled a rude epigram addressed to the Pope; the Golden Door of the temple of Pashka in Allahabad, on which are engraved 777 sacred cows; the Door of Cesare Borgia's guest house, which drove daggers into the backs of everyone who passed

Where is the borderline between fact and fiction in the Saint Saga? Criminologists will of course recognize some factual parallels in these pages with one of the great swindles of the century. But I did, truly, own that house described at St. George's Hill, England. L.C:

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through it; and so forth. Probably he will unscrupulously invent all this part out of his own imagination, exactly as I have done, but nobody will be any the wiser.

It is difficult, however, to see how the Door of the Barnyard Club, in London, could find a place in any such catalogue, being made of gimcrack deal and having no history or peculiarities. And yet, when it opened in the small hours of a certain morning to let Simon Templar out into Bond Street, it was for that brief moment the Door of Adventure.

Simon Templar stood at the edge of the sidewalk and put a thin cigarette between his lips, letting the cool air of the night play on his forehead and freshen his lungs; but there was no indication that freshening was his vital need. His dark rakish face seemed to have walked straight out of the open windswept places of the earth rather than out of the strained stuffy atmosphere of a night club, and his gay blue eyes could not have been clearer and keener at any hour of the day. His strong lawless mouth had a curve of half amused expectancy, as if his day were just beginning and he had a long list of diverting things to do; but there was nothing on his mind. It was only that Simon Templar's days were always ready to begin, at any hour, whenever adventure offered.

At his side Mr. Hoppy Uniatz, resplendent in a tight-waisted tuxedo and a shirt-front pinned together with a diamond stud, yawned cavernously and trod on the butt of his cigar. He was a less resiliently romantic soul, and he felt healthily depressed.

"Say, boss," he remarked querulously, "is dat what dey calls a big night in dis city?"

"I'm afraid it is," said the Saint.

Mr. Uniatz had none of that ascetic nobility of character which enables the Englishman to suffer his legislators gladly. He spat mournfully into the road.

"Cheese," he said, with a gloomy emulsion of awe and disgust, "it ain't human. De last joint we're in, dey snatch off all de glasses becos it's twelve-toity. We pay two bucks each to get into dis joint, an' den we gotta pay five bucks fer a jug of lemonade wit' a spoonful of gin in it; an' all dey got is a t'ree-piece band an' no floor show. An' de guys sit an' takes it! Why, if any joint had tried to gyp guys like dat in New York, even when we had prohibition, dey'd of wrecked it in two minutes." Mr. Uniatz sighed, and reached for the only apparent conclusion, unaware that other philosophers had reached it long before him.

"Well, maybe dem Limeys ain't human at dat."

"You forget that this is a free country, Hoppy," murmured the Saint gently.

He lighted his cigarette and blew out a wreath of smoke at the stars. A few spots of rain were beginning to fall from a bank of cloud that was climbing up from the west, and he scanned the street for a taxi to take them home. As if it had been conjured up in answer to his wish, a cab swung round the corner of Burlington Gardens and chugged towards them; and the Saint watched its approach hopefully. It was fifteen yards away when he saw that the flag was down, and shrugged ruefully. The set-back was only an apt epilogue to a consistently inauspicious evening.

"We'd better walk," he said.

They turned down towards Piccadilly; and then, as they fell into step, he heard the rattle of the taxi die down, and looked back over his shoulder. It had stopped outside the entrance of the Barnyard Club.

The Saint caught Hoppy's arm.

"Hold on," he said. "The luck's changed. We stay dry after all."

They strolled back towards the spot where this minor miracle stood panting metallically while its passenger alighted. It was a girl, he saw, as she stood fumbling with her bag.

"I'm afraid I haven't anything smaller," she was saying; and he heard that her voice was low and pleasant.

The driver grunted, and climbed down laboriously from his box. Standing in the gutter, he unbuttoned his overcoat, his coat, his waistcoat, his cardigan, and part of his shirt, and began a slow and painful search through the various strange and inaccessible places where London taxi-drivers secrete their small change. From scattered areas of his anatomy he collected over a period of time an assortment of coins, and looked at them under the light.

"Sorry, miss, I can't do it," he said at length, and began phlegmatically to dress himself again.

"I'll get change inside," said the girl.

But Simon Templar had other ideas. They had been growing on him while the driver disrobed, and the Saint had always been an opportunist. He liked the girl's voice and her slim figure and the way she wore her clothes; and that was enough for a beginning.

"Excuse me," he said. "Can I help?"

She looked up with a start, and for the first time he saw her face clearly. It was small and oval, with a fascinatingly tip-tilted nose and a mouth that

would smile easily; her deep brown hair, smooth and straight to the curled ends, framed her face in a soft halo of darkness. But even while he saw her brown eyes regarding him hesitantly he wondered if the dim light had deceived him—or if he had really seen, as he had thought he saw, a leap of sudden fear in them when she first looked up.

"We're only trying to change a pound," she said.

He took the note from her fingers and spread out a line of silver coins on her palm in return. She paid off the driver, who proceeded to bury the money in the outlying regions of his clothing; and she would have thanked him and gone on, but the Saint's other ideas had scarcely been tapped.

"Are you determined to go in there?" he asked, waving his pound note disparagingly in the direction of the Barnyard Club. "Hoppy and I didn't think much of it. Besides, you haven't got your pillow."

"Why should I want a pillow?"

"For comfort. Everybody else in there is asleep," he explained, "but the management doesn't provide pillows. They just create the demand."

The brown eyes searched his face doubtfully, with a glimpse of hunted suspicion that need not have been there. And once again he saw what he had seen before, the glimmering light of fear that went across her gaze—or was it across his own imagination?

"Thanks so much for helping me—good night," she said in a breath, and left the Saint staring after her with a puzzled smile till the door of the club closed behind her.

Simon tilted back his hat and turned resignedly to take possession of the asthmatic cab which was left as his only consolation; and as he turned, a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Do you know that girl?" asked a sleepy voice.

"Apparently not, Claud," answered the Saint sorrowfully. "I tried to, but she didn't seem to be sold on the idea. Life has these mysteries."

Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal studied him with half-closed eyes whose drowsiness was nothing but an affectation. His pudgy hand came down from the Saint's shoulder and took away the pound note which he was still holding; and the Saint's brows suddenly came down an invisible fraction of an inch.

"You don't mind if I have a look at this?" Teal said.

It was not so much a question as an authoritative demand; and a queer tingle of supernatural expectation touched Simon Tem-

plar's spine for an instant, and was gone. For the first time since the hand fell on his shoulder he looked beyond the detective's broad and portly form, and saw another solid bowler-hatted figure, equally broad but a shade less portly, kicking its regulation rubber heels a few paces away, as if waiting for the conversation to conclude. The Saint's suddenly quiet and watchful eyes swerved along the sidewalk in the other direction, and saw two other men of the same unmistakable pattern engrossed in inaudible discussion in the shadow of a shop doorway on his right. All at once, without a sound that his unguarded ears had noticed, the deserted street had acquired a population. . . .

A tiny pulse began to beat in the Saint's brain, a pulse that was little more than the echo of his own heart working steadily through a moment of utter physical stillness; and then he drew a deep lungful of air through his cigarette and let the smoke trickle out in a slow feather through the sparse twinkling beads of rain. After all, the night had not failed him. It had merely been teasing. What it would have to offer eventually he still did not know; but he knew that three men out of the mould which he saw do not abruptly assemble in Bond Street, materialising like genii out of the damp pavingstones at two o'clock in the morning, and bring Chief Inspector Teal with them, for no other reason than that they have been simultaneously smitten with an urge to discover at first hand whether the night life of London is as dull as it is universally reputed to be. And wherever and whenever such a deputation of official talent was gathered together, Simon Templar had a potential interest in the proceedings.

"What's the matter with it?" he inquired thoughtfully.

Mr. Teal straightened up slowly from his examination of the bank-note under one of the taxi's feeble lights. He took out his wallet and folded the bill in deliberately.

"You won't mind if I look after it for you?" he said, with the same authoritative decision.

"Help yourself," murmured the Saint lavishly. "Are you starting a collection, or something? I've got a few more of those if you'd like 'em."

The detective buttoned his coat and glanced towards the two men who were conversing in the adjacent doorway. Without appearing to interrupt their conversation, they moved out on to the pavement and came nearer.

"I'm surprised at you, Saint," he said, with what in anyone else would have been a tinge of

malicious humor, "being taken in with a thing like that at your age. Is this the first time you've seen a bit of slush?"

"I like 'em that way," said the Saint slowly. "You know me, Claud. I never cared for this mass-production stuff. I've always believed in encouraging individual enterprise——"

"It's a good job I watched you encouraging it," said the detective grimly. "With your reputation, you wouldn't have stood much chance if you'd been caught trying to pass a counterfeit note." A wrinkle of belated regret for a lost opportunity creased his forehead as that last poignant thought entrenched itself in his mind. "Perhaps I wouldn't have been in such a hurry to take it away from you if I'd remembered that before," he added candidly.

The Saint smiled; but the smile was only on his lips.

"You have the friendliest inspirations, dear old bird," he remarked amiably. "Why not give it back? There's still time; and I see you've got lots of your old school pals around."

"I've got something else to do," said Mr. Teal. He squared his shoulders, and his mouth set in a line along which many things might have been read. "If I want to ask you anything more about this, I'll know where to find you," he said, and turned brusquely away towards the door of the club.

As he did so, the other man who had been kicking his heels in the middle background roused out of his vague detachment and went after him. The second pair of detectives who had been strolling closer drifted unobtrusively into the same route. There was nothing dramatic, nothing outwardly sensational about it; but it had the mechanical precision of a manœuvre by a well-drilled squad of soldiers. For one or two brief seconds the three men who had appeared so surprisingly out of the empty night were clustered at the doorway like bees alighting at the entrance of a hive; and then they had filtered through, without fuss or ostentation, as if they had never been there. The door was closed again, and the broken lights and shadows of the street were so still that the patter of swelling raindrops on the parched pavements could be heard like a rustle of leaves in the absence of any other sound.

Simon put his cigarette to his lips, with his eyes fixed on the blank door, and drained it of the last slow inhalation. He dropped it between his fingers and shifted the toe of a polished, patent-leather shoe, blotting it out. The evening had done its stuff. It had provided the wherewithal. . . . He put his hands in his trouser pockets and felt the lightness which had been left

there by the twenty shillings' worth of good silver which he had paid out in exchange for that confiscated scrap of forged Bank of England paper; and he remembered a bewitching face and the shadow of fear which had come and gone in its brown eyes. But at that moment he was at a loss to know what he could do.

And then an awful noise broke the silence behind him. It was a frightful, clattering, consumptive hiccough which turned into a continuous sobbing rattle in which all the primeval anguish of ancient iron and steel was orchestrated into one grinding medley of discords. The taxi which had brought Adventure's offering had started up again.

Simon Templar turned. He had been mad for years, and it was much too late in life to begin striving after sanity. His face was dazzling seraphic as he looked up at the re-habilimented driver, who was settling stoically into his seat.

"Does this happen to be your own cab, brother?" he asked.

"Yes, guv'nor," said the man. "Jer wanter buy it?"

"That's exactly what I do want," said the Saint.

II

THE driver gaped down at him with a feeble fish-like grin—handsomer men than he had been smitten in the same way when their facetious witticisms were taken literally.

"Wot?" he said weakly, expressing the ultimate essence of cosmic doubt in the one irreducible monosyllable which philosophers have sought in vain for centuries.

"I want to buy your cab," said the Saint. "I'm collecting specimens for a museum. What's the price?"

"Five 'undred quid, guv'nor, an' it's yours," stated the proud owner, clinging hysterically to his joke.

Simon took out his billfold and counted out five crackling banknotes. The driver crawled down from his box with glazed eyes, and clutched at one rusty mudguard for support.

"You ain't arf pulling me leg, are yer?" he said.

Simon folded the notes and pushed them into his hand.

"Take those round to a bank in the morning, and see what your leg feels like," he advised, and took out another note as an afterthought. "Will a fiver buy your coat and cap as well?"

"Blimey, guv'nor," replied the driver, unbuttoning again with sudden vigour, "you could 'ave me shirt an' trousers as well for arf that."

The Saint stood for a moment and watched the happily be-

reaved driver veering somewhat light-headedly out of view; and then, beside him, Hoppy Uniatz groped audibly for comprehension.

"What kinda joke is dis, boss?" he asked; and the Saint pulled himself together.

"It'll grow on you as the years go by, Hoppy," he said kindly.

He was pulling on the driver's big grubby overcoat and winding the nondescript muffler round his neck with the speed and efficiency of a quick-change artist between scenes. In the emptiness of the street there was no one to see him. His black felt had came off and was dumped into Hoppy's hands; the driver's peaked cap took its place. For a moment Hoppy saw the dark clean-cut face blithe and buccaneering under the shade of the cap, the white teeth glinting in a smile that had no respect for any impossibilities.

"You won't be able to stay here and share it with me," said the Saint. "I've got another job for you. Get hold of this address: 26, Abbott's Yard, Chelsea. You'd better take a taxi—but not this one. Go straight there and make yourself at home. There's a bottle of Scotch in the pantry; and here's the key. We're going to throw a party."

"Okay, boss," said Mr. Uniatz dimly.

He took the key, stowed it away in his pocket, and without another word hoofed phlegmatically away in the direction of Piccadilly. It would be untrue to say that he had grasped the point with inspired intuition; but certain nouns and verbs had conglomerated in his mind to indicate a course of action, and therefore he was taking it. His brain, which was a small and loosely-knit organisation of nerve endings accustomed to directing such simple activities as eating, sleeping, and shooting off guns, was not adapted to the higher mysteries of inductive speculation; but it had a protective affinity for the line of least resistance. If the Saint required him to go to Chelsea and look for a bottle of Scotch, that was jake with him.

And, heading on his way with that plodding single-mindedness in which Lot's wife was so unfortunately lacking, he did not see the Saint climb into the driver's seat and steer his museum specimen up the road; nor did he see any of the other enlightening things which happened in that district shortly afterwards.

Chief Inspector Teal came out of the Barnyard Club and looked up and down the street.

"You and Henderson can go home," he said to one of the men

with him. "I shan't need you any more tonight."

He put up a hand to stop the ancient taxi which came crawling hopefully towards them at that moment, and as it stopped he turned to the two people who had been added to his party since he entered the club.

"Get in," he ordered briefly.

He watched his prisoners embark with stolid vigilance—the raid had not by any means been as successful as he had hoped, and he would not know how much he had got out of it until the two arrests had been questioned. The other detective followed them in, and Teal paused to direct the driver to Cannon Row Police Station. Then he also got in, and settled his bulk on the other folding seat, facing his captives.

The taxi jolted away with a hideous clanking of gears, and Mr. Teal pulled out a large silver watch and calculated his expectation of sleep. The other detective inspected his finger-nails and nibbled a peeling scrap of cuticle on his thumb. The two prisoners sat in silence—the girl whose pound note Simon Templar had changed, and a dark florid man whose shirt-front sported a large square emerald which no arbiter of fashion could have approved. Mr. Teal did not even look at them. His hands lay primly on his knees, and his plump face was torpid, inscrutable, unworried. The case might be solved that night, or it might wait a year for solution. It made no difference to him. The relentless dogged routine which he represented took little account of time, and it had very few of the sensational brilliancies and hectic pursuits beloved of writers of fiction: it was a matter of taking up one trivial clue, following it with mechanical logic until it led no further, dropping it and patiently picking up the next; and usually the net was completed some day and a man was prosaically caught. Except when the man for whom the net was woven happened to be the Saint. . . . A slight frown crossed Teal's round red face as that unwelcome reflection obtruded itself in his train of thought; and then the taxi, which for some minutes past had been puffing more and more wearily, finally expired with a last senile wheeze and would travel no farther.

Teal looked round with a scowl of more immediate irritation; and the driver climbed down and opened the bonnet of the machine. They were in a dingy narrow street which Teal did not recognise, for he had not been paying any attention to the route. He put his head out of the window.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Dunno yet," grunted the driver, still groping in the bowels of his antediluvian engine.

Teal fidgeted through a few minutes of silence, and then turned to his subordinate.

"See if you can find out where we are, Durham," he said. "We can't sit here all night."

The other detective opened the door on his side and got down. Seen in fuller perspective, the road in which they had stopped was even more unprepossessing than it had looked through the windows. One thing about it at least was certain—no other taxi was likely to come cruising along it in the hope of picking up a fare.

Durham walked up to the driver, who was still half buried in his machinery, and seemed ready to remain in that position indefinitely, like a modern Indian fakir trying out a novel method of mortifying the flesh.

"Where's the nearest taxi-rack?" he asked.

"Nearest one I know is at Victoria Station—that's abaht ten minnits' walk," said the man. "Arf a sec, guv'nor—I think p'raps she'll go now."

He went round to the front and swung the handle. The taxi did go. It went better than Sergeant Durham had ever expected.

Confronting the seething wrath of Chief Inspector Teal later, he was unable to give any satisfactory explanation of what happened to him. He knew that the driver straightened up and walked around to resume his post at the wheel; but he did not notice that the man reached his seat quicker than any other taxi-driver in Durham's experience had ever been known to complete such a manœuvre. And in any case, Sergeant Durham was not expecting to be left behind.

But that was what indubitably happened to him. At one moment, a practical hard-headed detective, secure in his faith in the commonplace facts of life, he was putting out his hand to open the door of the cab; in the next moment, the handle had been whisked away from under his very finger-tips, and he was staring open-mouthed at the retreating stern of the vehicle as it faded noisily away down the road. The only other fact he had presence of mind enough to grasp was that its tail-light was out so that he could not read the number—which, as Mr. Teal later pointed out to him, was not useful.

Chief Inspector Teal, however, had not yet got down to that unprofitable post-mortem. The jerk with which the taxi started off flung him forward into the arms of his captives, and some distance was travelled before he could disentangle himself. He

rapped violently on the partition window, without securing any response. More distance was covered before he got it open and unleashed his voice into the din of the thumping engine.

"You fool!" he shouted. "You've left the other man behind!"

"Wot?" said the driver, without turning his head or slackening speed.

"You've left the other man behind, you damned idiot!" Mr. Teal bawled furiously.

"Behind wot?" yelled the driver, taking a corner on two wheels.

Mr. Teal hauled himself up from the corner into which the sudden lurch had thrown him, and thrust his face through the opening.

"Stop the cab, will you?" he bellowed at the top of his voice.

The driver shook his head and reeled round another corner.

"You'll 'ave to talk lahder, guv'nor," he said. "I'm a bit 'ard of 'earing."

Teal clung savagely to the strap, and his rubicund complexion took on a tinge of heliotrope. He put a hand through the window, grasped the man's collar, and shook him viciously.

"*Stop,* I said!" he roared past the driver's ear. "Stop, or I'll break your bloody neck!"

"Wot did you say abaht my neck?" demanded the driver.

Thousands of things which he had not said, but which he had a sudden yearning to say, combined with multitudinous other observations on the anatomy of the man and his ancestors, flooded into the detective's overheated mind; but at that moment he felt rather than heard a movement behind him, and turned round quickly. The florid man had seen Heaven-sent opportunity in the accident, and Teal was just in time to dodge the savage blow that was aimed at his head.

The struggle that followed was short and one-sided. Mr. Teal's temper had been considerably shortened in the last few minutes, and he had a good deal of experience in handling refractory prisoners. In about six seconds he had the man securely handcuffed to one of the handgraps in the cab, and as an added precaution he manacled the girl in the same way. Then, with his wrath in no way relieved by those six seconds of violent exercise, he turned again to resume his vendetta with the driver.

But the taxi was already slowing down. Filling his lungs, Teal devoted one delicious instant to a rapid selection of the words in which he would blast the chauffeur off the face of the earth; and then the cab stopped, and his vocabulary stuck in his gullet. For without a word the

driver bowed over the wheel and buried his face in his arms. His shoulders heaved. Mr. Teal could scarcely believe what he heard. It sounded like a sob.

"Hey," said Mr. Teal tentatively.

The driver did not move.

Mr. Teal began to feel uncomfortable. He reviewed the things he had said during his moment of exasperation. Had he been unduly harsh? Perhaps the driver really was hard of hearing. Perhaps he had some kind of sensitive complex about his neck. Mr. Teal did not wish to be unkind.

"Hey," he said, more loudly. "What's the matter?"

Another sob answered him. Mr. Teal ran a finger round the inside of his collar. A demonstration like that was beyond the scope of his training in first aid. He wondered what he ought to do. Hysterical women, he seemed to remember having read somewhere, were best brought to their senses by judicious firmness.

"Hey," shouted Teal suddenly. *"Sit up!"*

The driver did not sit up.

Mr. Teal cleared his throat awkwardly. He glanced at his two prisoners. They were safely held. The grief-stricken driver's need seemed to be greater than theirs; and Mr. Teal wanted to get on to Cannon Row and finish his night's work.

He opened the door and got down into the road.

And it was then, exactly at the moment when Chief Inspector Teal's heavy boots grounded on the tarmac, that the second remarkable incident in that ride occurred. It was a thing which handicapped Mr. Teal rather unfairly in his subsequent interview with Sergeant Durham. For as soon as he had got down, the driver, obeying his last command as belatedly as he had obeyed the former ones, did sit up. He did more than that. He lifted his foot off the clutch and simultaneously trod on the accelerator; and the taxi went rattling away and left Mr. Teal gaping foolishly after it.

III

Simon Templar drove to Lower Sloane Street before he stopped again, and then he got down and opened the door of the passenger compartment. The dark florid man glowered at him uncertainly; and Simon decided that fifty per cent of his freight had no further romantic possibilities.

"I don't think you're going any further with us, brother," he said.

He produced a key from his ring, unlocked one of the handcuffs, and hauled the passenger out. The man made a lunge at him, and Simon calmly tripped

him across the sidewalk and clipped the loose bracelet on to a bar of the nearest area railings. Then he went back to the cab and smiled at the girl.

"I expect you'd be more comfortable without that jewellery, wouldn't you?" he murmured.

He detached her handcuffs with the same key, and used them to pinion the florid man's other wrist to a second rail.

"I'm afraid you'll have to be the consolation prize, Theobald," he remarked, and stooped to remove the square emerald from the cursing consolation's shirt-front. "You won't mind if I borrow this, will you? I've got a friend who likes this sort of thing."

With only one other stop, which he made in Sloane Square to rekindle the rear light from which he had thoughtfully removed the bulb some time before, he drove the creaking taxi to Abbot's Yard. The tears were rolling down his cheeks, and from time to time his body was shaken by one of those racking sobs which Mr. Teal had so greviously misunderstood. It is given to every man to enjoy so many immortal memories and no more; and the Saint liked to enjoy them when they came.

Ten minutes later he stopped the palpitating cab in Abbot's Yard, outside the door of No. 26. Anyone else would have driven it twenty miles out of London and buried it in a field before going home in their frantic desire to eliminate all trace of their association with it; but Simon Templar's was an inspired simplicity which amounted to genius. He knew that if the cab was found in Abbott's Yard by any prowling sleuth who could identify it, then Abbot's Yard was the last place on earth where the same sleuth would look for him; and he was still smiling as he climbed down and opened the door.

"Will you come out, fair lady?" he said.

She got out, staring at him uncertainly; and he indicated the door of the house.

"This is where I live—sometimes," he explained. "Don't look so surprised. Even cab-drivers can be artists. I draw voluptuous nudes with engine-oil on old cylinder blocks—it's supposed to be frightfully modern."

Abbot's Yard, Chelsea, is one of those multitudinous little lanes which open off the King's Road. To say that not twenty years ago it had been a row of slum cottages would be practising a bourgeois *suppressio veri*: it had certainly been a slum, but it still was. If anything, Simon was inclined to think that the near-artists and synthetic Bohemians who now populated it had lowered the tone of the neighbourhood; but the studio which he rented in No. 26 had often

served him well as an emergency address, and in his irregular life it was sometimes an advantage to have quarters in a district where eccentric goings-on attracted far less attention than they would have in South Kensington.

He steered the girl up the dark narrow stairs with a hand on her arm, and felt that she was trembling—he was not surprised. From the studio, as they drew near, came the sounds of a melancholy voice raised in inharmonious song; and the Saint grinned. He opened the door, passing the girl in and closing it again behind them, and surveyed Mr. Uniatz reprovingly.

"I see you found the whisky," he said.

"Sure," said Mr. Uniatz, rising a trifle unsteadily, but beaming an honest welcome none the less. "It was in de pantry, jus' like ya tole me, boss."

The Saint sighed.

"It'll never be there again," he said, "unless you lose your way." He was stripping off his taxi-driver's overcoat and peaked cap; and as he did so, in the full light, the girl recognised him, and he saw her eyes widen. "This bloke with the skinful is Mr. Hoppy Uniatz, old dear—a handy man with a Roscoe but not so hot on the Higher Thought. If I knew your name I'd introduce you."

"I'm Annette Vickery," said the girl. "But I don't even know who you are."

"I'm Simon Templar," he said. "They call me the Saint."

She caught her breath for an instant; and suddenly she seemed to see him again for the first time, and the flicker of fear came and went in her brown eyes. He stood with his hands in his pockets, lean and dark and dangerous and debonair, smiling at her with a cigarette between his lips and a wisp of smoke curling past his eyes; and it is only fair to say that he enjoyed his moment. But still he smiled, at himself and her.

"Well, I'm not a cannibal," he murmured, "although you may have heard rumours. Why don't you sit down and let's finish our talk?"

She sat down slowly.

"About—pillows?" she said, with the ghost of a smile; and he began to laugh.

"Or something."

He sent Hoppy Uniatz out to the kitchen to brew coffee, and gave her a cigarette. She might have been twenty-two or twenty-three, he saw—the indifferent lighting of Bond Street had had no need to be kind to her. He was more sure than ever that her red mouth would smile easily, and there would be mischief in the brown eyes; but he would have to lift more than a corner

of the shadow to see those things.

"I told you the Barnyard Club was no place to go," he said, drawing up a chair. "Why wouldn't you take my advice?"

"I didn't understand."

All at once he realised that she was crediting him with having known that the raid was going to take place; but he showed nothing in his face.

"You've got hold of it now?"

She shrugged helplessly.

"Some of it. But I still don't know why you should have—bothered to get me out of the mess."

"That's a long story," he said cheerfully. "You ought to ask Chief Inspector Teal about it some day—he'll be able to tell you more. Somehow we just seem to get in each other's way. But if you're thinking that you owe me something for it, I'm afraid you're right."

He saw the glimmer of fear in her eyes again; and yet he knew that she was not afraid of him. She had no reason to be. But she was afraid.

"You—kill people—don't you?" she said after a long silence.

The question sounded so startlingly naïve that he wanted to laugh; but something told him not to. He drew at his cigarette with a perfectly straight face.

"Sometimes even fatally," he admitted, with only the veiled mockery in his eyes to show for that glint of humour. "Why—is there anyone you'd like to see taken off? Hoppy Uniatz will do it for you if I haven't time."

"What do you kill them for?"

"Our scale is rather elastic," he said, endeavouring to maintain his gravity. "Sometimes we have done it for nothing. Mostly we charge by the yard——"

"I don't mean that." She was smoking her cigarette in short nervous puffs, and her hands were still unsteady. "I mean, if a man wasn't really bad—if he'd just made a mistake and got into bad company——"

Simon nodded, and stood up.

"You're rather sweet," he said humorously. "But I know what you mean. You're frightened by some of the stories you've heard about me. Well, kid—how about giving your own common sense a chance? I've just lifted you straight out of the hands of the police. They're looking for you now, and before tomorrow morning every flat-footed dick in London will be joining in the search. If I wanted to get tough with you I wouldn't need any third degree—I'd just have to promise to turn you right out into the street if you didn't come through. I haven't said a word about that, have I?" The Saint smiled; and in the quick flash of that particular smile the armour of worldlier women than

she had melted like wax. "But I do want you to talk. Come on, now—what's it all about?"

She was silent for a moment, tapping her cigarette over the ashtray long after all the loose ash had flaked away; and then her hands moved in a helpless gesture.

"I don't know."

Her eyes turned to meet his when she spoke, and he knew she was not merely stalling. He waited with genuine seriousness; and presently she said: "The boy who got into bad company was my brother. Honestly he isn't really bad. I don't know what happened to him. He didn't need to be dishonest—he was so clever. Even when he was a kid at school he could draw and paint like a professional. Everyone said he had a marvellous future. When he was nineteen he went to an art school. Even the professors said he was a genius. He used to drink a bit too much, and he was a bit wild; but that was only because he was young. I'm eighteen months older than he is, you see. I didn't like some of his friends. That man who was—arrested with me—was one of them."

"And what's his name?"

"Jarving—Kenneth Jarving. . . . I think he used to flatter Tim—make him feel he was being a man of the world. I didn't like him. He tried to make love to me. But he became Tim's best friend . . . and then—Tim was arrested for forgery. And it turned out that Jarving knew about it all the time. He was the head of the gang that Tim was forging the notes for. But the police didn't get him."

"Charming fellow," said the Saint thoughtfully.

Hoppy Uniatz came in with the coffee, opened his mouth to utter some cheery conversation, sensed the subtle quietness of the atmosphere, and did not utter it. He stood on one foot, leaving his mouth open for future employment, and scratched his head, frowning vaguely. Annette Vickery went on, without paying any attention to him.

"Of course, Tim went to prison. I suppose they really meant to be kind to him. They only gave him eighteen months. They said he was obviously the victim of somebody much older and more experienced. I believe he might have got off altogether if he'd put them on to Jarving, who was the man they really wanted. But Tim wouldn't do it. And he swore he'd never forgive me if I said anything. I suppose—I shouldn't have taken any notice. But he was so emphatic. I was afraid. I didn't know what the others might have done to him if he'd given

them away. I—I didn't say anything. So Tim went to prison.

"How long ago was that?"

"He came out three weeks ago. He was let off some of his sentence for good conduct. I was the only one who knew when he was coming out. Jarving tried to make me tell him, but I wouldn't. I wanted to try and keep Tim out of his way. And Tim said he wouldn't go back. He got a job in the printing works at Dulwich, through the Prisoners' Aid Society; and he was going to take up drawing again in his spare time and try to make a decent living at it. I believed he would. I still believe it. But—that pound note you changed . . . it was part of some money he gave me only yesterday, to pay back some that I'd lent him. He said he'd sold some cartoons to a magazine."

The Saint put down his cigarette and picked up the coffeepot. He nodded.

"I see. But that still doesn't tell me why you had to go to the Barnyard Club and get pinched."

"That's what I still don't understand. I'm only trying to tell you everything that happened. Jarving rang me up this evening and asked if he could see me. I made excuses—I didn't want to see him. Then he said there'd be trouble for Tim if I didn't. He told me to meet him at the Barnyard Club. I had to go."

"And what was the trouble?"

"He'd only started to tell me when the police came in. He wanted to know where he could get hold of Tim. I wouldn't tell him. He said. 'Look here, I'm not trying to get your brother in trouble again. This isn't anything to do with me. It's somebody else who wants to see him.' I still didn't believe him. Then he said he'd give me this man's name and address himself, and I could give it to Tim myself, and Tim could go there on his own. But he said Tim had got to go, somehow."

"Did he give you the name and address?"

"Yes. He wrote it down on a piece of paper, just before——"

"Have you got it?"

She opened her bag and took out a scrap of paper torn from a wine list. Simon took it and glanced over the writing.

And in that instant all his lazy good humour, all the relaxed and patient quiet with which he had listened to her story, were swept away as if a silent bomb had annihilated them.

"Is this it?" he said aimlessly; and she found his clear blue eyes on her, for that moment absolutely without mockery, raking her face with a blaze of azure light that was the most dynamic thing she had ever seen.

"That's it," she said hesitantly.

"I've never heard the name before——"

"I have."

The Saint smiled. He had been marking time since the last gorgeous climax which his reckless impetuosity had given him, feeling his way towards the next move almost like an artist waiting for renewed inspiration; but he knew now where he was going. He looked again at the scrap of paper on which outrageous fortune had jotted down his cue. On it was written:

Ivar Nordsten,
Hawk Lodge,
St. George's Hill,
Weybridge.

"I want to know why one of the richest men in Europe is so anxious to meet your brother," he said. "And I think your brother will have to keep the appointment to find out."

He saw the fear struggling back into her eyes.

"But——"

The Saint laughed, and shook his head. He indicated Hoppy Uniatz, who had transferred his balance to the other foot, and his scratching operations to his left ear.

"There's your brother, darling. He may not have all the artistic gifts of the real Timothy, but he's a handy man in trouble, as I told you. I'll lend him to you free of charge. What d'you say?"

"Hot diggety," said Mr. Uniatz.

IV

When Annette Vickery woke up the sun was streaming into her bedroom window, and she looked out into a wide glade of pinetrees and silver birches lifting from the rolling banks of heather and bracken. It was hard to believe that this was less than twenty miles from London, where so many strange things had happened in the darkness a few hours ago, and where all the forces of Scotland Yard would still be searching for her.

They had driven down over the dark glistening roads in the Saint's Hirondel—a very different proposition from the spavined taxi which he had driven before—after a telephone call which he put through to a Weybridge number; and when they arrived there were lights in the house, and a gruff-voiced man who walked with a curious strutting limp waiting to put the car away without any indication that he was at all surprised at his master arriving at four o'clock in the morning with two guests. Whisky, sandwiches, and a steaming pot of coffee were set out on a table in the living-room; and the Saint grinned.

"Orace is used to me," he explained. "If I rang up and told

him I was arriving with three hungry lions and a kidnapped bishop, he wouldn't even blink."

It was the same man with the limp who came in with a cup of tea in the morning.

"Nice day, miss," he said.

He put the cup down on the table beside the bed and looked at her pugnaciously—he had a heavy walrus moustache which made it permanently impossible for anyone to tell when he was smiling.

"Yer barf's ready," he said, as if he were addressing a dumb recruit on a parade-ground, "an' brekfuss'll be ready narf a minnit."

It was only another curiosity in the stream of fantastic happenings that had carried her beyond all the horizons of ordinary life.

She was down to breakfast in twenty minutes; but even so she found the Saint drinking coffee and reading a newspaper, while Hoppy Uniatz finished up the toast. Simon served her with eggs and bacon from the chafing-dish.

"You'll probably find the egg a bit tough," he remarked, "but we have to toe the line at mealtimes. When Orace says 'Brekfuss narf a minnit' he means breakfast in exactly thirty seconds, and you can check your stop-watch by him. I hid a piece of toast for you, too; or else Hoppy would have had it. How d'you feel?"

"Fine," she told him; and, tackling succulent rashers and eggs that were not too tough to make the mouth water, she was surprised to find that a fugitive from justice could still eat breakfast with a good appetite.

She looked out of the french doors that opened from the dining-room on to the same view as she had seen from her bedroom when she awoke—the sunlit glade striped with the shadows of the trees—and said "Where am I?—isn't that what everyone's supposed to say when they wake up?"

The Saint smiled.

"Or else they call for mother." He pushed back his chair and tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail. "This is Holy George's hill itself, though you mightn't believe I can drive you from here to Piccadilly Circus without hurrying in half an hour. I bought this place because I don't know anywhere else like it where you can forget London so easily and get there so quickly if you have to; but it seems as if it has other uses. By the way, there's some news in the paper that may appeal to your sense of humour."

He passed her the folded sheet and marked a place with his forefinger. It was a brief paragraph in a minor position which simply recorded that Scotland

Yard detectives had entered the Barnyard Club in Bond Street and taken away a man and a young woman "for questioning".

"Of course, the part where I butted in may have been too late for this edition," said the Saint. "But I still don't think the public will hear any more about it just now. If there's anything in the history of England which Claud Eustace Teal would perjure his immortal soul to keep out of the news, I'm willing to bet it's that little game we played last night. But it still wouldn't be fatal if the story did leak out—you've only got to see Nordsten long enough to introduce your brother, and then you push off. If he did get inquisitive afterwards, Tim wouldn't know anything—would you, Hoppy?"

"No, boss," said Mr. Uniatz, shaking his head vigorously. "I don't know nut'n about nut'n."

"But what about Jarving?" put in the girl.

"Jarving is safe in clink," said the Saint with conviction. "If the first person who found him wasn't a policeman, which it probably was at that hour of the morning. I don't think anyone who found him could get those handcuffs off without a policeman happening along. So the coast seems to be as clear as we're ever likely to have it."

She finished her breakfast and drank the coffee which he poured out for her; and then he gave her a cigarette.

"Get hold of yourself, kid," he said. "I want you to be starting soon."

For an instant her stomach felt empty as she realised that once outside the shelter of that house she was a fugitive again, even if the very idea of policemen seemed absurd in that peaceful place. And then she felt his blue eyes resting on her appraisingly, and managed a smile.

"All right, Don Q," she said. "What is it?"

"Your share is easy. You've only got to walk up to Hawk Lodge and introduce Hoppy as your brother. I don't expect you'll be asked to stay, and I'll be waiting right round the corner to drive you back. The rest is Hoppy's funeral—or it may be if he doesn't get the lead out of his sleeve on the draw."

Looking towards Mr. Uniatz, she saw his hand move with the speed of a bullet, and stared into the muzzle of an automatic which had somehow appeared in his grasp.

"Was dat fast," he asked indignantly, "or was dat fast?"

"I think it was fast," said the girl gravely.

"Say, an' can I shoot wit' it?" proclaimed Mr. Uniatz, rewarding her with a beam that dis-

played all his gold fillings. "Say, I betcha never see a guy t'row two cups in de air an' beam 'em wit' one shot."

"Yes, she has," said the Saint, moving Hoppy's cup rapidly away from under his eager fingers. "And she doesn't like it. Now for Heaven's sake put that Betsy away and listen. Your name's Tim Vickery—have you got that?"

"Sure. Tim Vickery—dat's my name."

"You're an artist."

"What me?" protested Mr. Uniatz plaintively. "Say, boss, you know I can't do dat pansy stuff."

"You don't have to," said the Saint patiently. "That's just your profession. You were brought up in America—that'll account for your accent—but you're really English. About fifteen months ago you were——"

"Say, boss," suggested Mr. Uniatz pleadingly, "why can't I be a bootlegger? You know, one of de big shots. Wit' dat emerald ya gimme last night, I could do it poifect."

Simon breathed deeply.

"I tell you, you're an artist," he said relentlessly. "There aren't any bootleggers in this story. About fifteen months ago you were arrested for forgery——"

"Say, boss," said Mr. Uniatz, with his homely brow deeply wrinkled in the effort of following a train of thought that was incapable of being hurried, "what was dat crack about de pansy stuff bein' my profession?"

The Saint sighed, and got up. For a minute or two he paced up and down the room, smoking his cigarette and staring at the carpet; and then he turned abruptly.

"The hell with it," he said. "I'm going to be Tim Vickery."

"But dat's my name," complained Hoppy.

"I'll borrow it," Simon said bluntly. "I don't think it suits you." He looked at the girl. "I was going to put Hoppy in because I thought the most important part of the job would be outside, but now I'm not so sure. I don't think there's much difference—and I'm afraid the inside stand is a bit out of Hoppy's distance. Are you all set to go? I want to show you something, and I've got to make a phone call."

He led her across the hall to the study which adjoined the living-room, and picked up the telephone on the desk. In a few moments he was through to London.

"Hullo, Pat," he said. "I thought you'd be back. Did you have a swell time? . . . Grand. I'm down at Weybridge. Now listen, keed—can you catch the next train down? . . . Well, we've had a certain amount of song

and skylarking while you've been away, and I've got a damsel in distress down here, and now I've got to push off again. That only leaves Hoppy and Orace, so you'll have to do your celebrated chaperoning act. . . . No, nothing desperate; but Claud Eustace may be puffing and blowing a bit in the near future. . . . Good girl. Then the damsel in distress will tell you all about it when you arrive. So long, darling. Be seein' ya."

He hung up the instrument and turned back with a smile.

"You're going to meet Patricia Holm," he said. "Which is rather a privilege. When she gets here, tell her everything—from the beginning right down to where I take up your brother's name. Do you understand? If there's any trouble—whether it's from Act of God or Chief Inspector Teal—Pat will be able to handle it better than anyone else I know."

She nodded.

"I'll be all right."

"If I didn't think so, I wouldn't be leaving you," he said, and went to a bookcase beside the desk. "Now here's the next thing. If there's any trouble and if Pat isn't here, Orace will know—this is your way out."

The entire bookcase opened like a door on well-oiled hinges, giving her a glimpse of what appeared to be a passage.

"It isn't a passage," he explained, closing the bookcase again. "It's just a space between two walls. I built it myself. But they're both solid, so it can't be found by tapping around to see if anything sounds hollow. There's an armchair and some magazines, and it's ventilated; but you'd better not smoke. This is how it works. If the door's closed, and you open this drawer of the desk till it clicks, and then pull out the second shelf . . ."

He showed her how to manipulate the series of locks which he had devised.

"There's just one other thing," he said. "I want you to ring me up to-night—or get Pat to do it and say she's you. Just talk as if you were talking to Tim, because somebody may listen on the line. But listen very carefully to what I say at the other end. If there's anything I want, I'll be able to let you know."

Mr.Uniatz, who had been nibbling the end of a black cigar and watching all these proceedings with a vacant expression, cleared his throat and gave utterance to a problem which had been puzzling him ever since he left the breakfast table.

"Boss," he interupted diffidently. "what's wrong wit' my accent?"

"Nothing at all," said the Saint. "It reminds me of a nightjar calling to its mate." He put a hand on the girl's shoulder. "If

you're ready now, we'll go."

They walked down a leafy avenue over the hill. There were starlings cheeping in the undergrowth, and the air was hazy with the promise of a fine day. The world was so still, without even a whisper of distant traffic, that her adventure seemed yet more unbelievable.

"Why are you taking so much trouble?" she had to ask; and he laughed.

"You've heard that I'm an outlaw, haven't you? And an outlaw lives by the supply of boodle. I know we still haven't very much to go on; but when a bird like Ivar Nordsten is falling over himself to get in touch with a convicted forger, I kind of get inquisitive. Besides, there's another thing. If I could dump the evidence of some really full-grown ungodliness into Teal's lap, he mightn't feel quite so upset about losing you."

A quarter of an hour's walk brought them to the gates of Hawk Lodge. They went up the broad gravelled drive and came upon the house suddenly round a bend that skirted a clump of trees—a big neo-Jacobean mansion that looked out over terraced gardens to the haze that hid another range of hills far to the south.

A grey-haired saturnine butler with a slight foreign accent took their names.

"Miss Vickery and Mr. Vickery? Will you wait?"

He left them in the great bare hall and passed through a door which opened off it. In a few moments he came back.

"Mr. Nordsten does not need to see Miss Vickery today," he said. "Will Mr. Vickery come in?"

Simon nodded, and smiled at the girl.

"Okay, sister," he murmured. "Thanks for bringing me—and take care of yourself."

Quite naturally he kissed her; and she went back down the broad drive again feeling very much alone.

V

"Sit down, Mr. Vickery," said Nordsten cordially. "I'm glad we were able to find you. Would you like a cigar?"

He sat behind a wide mahogany desk in a library that was pannelled out from floor to ceiling with bookcases, more like the study of a university professor than of an internationally famous financier. The illusion was heightened by his physique, which was broad-shouldered and tall in spite of a scholarly stoop, and his bald dome-like skull ringed round at the level of his ears with a horseshoe of sandy-grey hair. Only a trace of over-emphasis on his guttural conso-

nants betrayed his Scandinavian upbringing; and only a certain unblinking rigidity in his pale blue eyes, a certain tense restraint in the movements of his large white hands, marked the man whose business instincts commanded millions where others played with hundreds.

"Thanks."

Simon took a cigar, sniffed it with an affection of wisdom, and stuck it between his teeth with the band on. It was an inferior cigar; but Tim Vickery would know no better.

"You look older than I heard you were," said Nordsten, holding out a match.

The Saint shrugged sullenly.

"Prison life doesn't help you to look young," he said.

"Does it teach you any lessons?" asked Nordsten.

"I don't know what you mean," Simon answered defensively.

The financier's mouth made a fractional movement that might have been intended for a smile; but his hard unblinking gaze remained on the Saint's face.

"Only a short while ago," he explained, "you were a young man with a brilliant future. Everyone thought well of you. You might have continued your training and become a very successful artist. But you didn't. You devoted your exceptional talents to forging bank-notes—doubtless, not to mince matters, because you thought the rewards would be quicker and bigger than legitimate art would pay. But they weren't. You were arrested and sent to prison. You had leisure to reflect that quick profits are not always so quick as they first appear—that is, as I was trying to find out, if you learnt your lesson.

Simon grimaced.

"Well, is that why you sent for me?"

"I take it that my diagnosis is correct," said Nordsten blandly.

"How do you know?"

"My dear boy, your conviction was mentioned quite prominently in the newspapers. I remember that it was considered remarkable that a youth of your age should have produced the cleverest forgeries that the police witness could remember. The rest is merely a matter of deduction and elementary psychology." Nordsten leaned back and rolled his match between the finger and thumb of one hand. "But I remember thinking at the time what a pity it was that so much talent should have been employed in a comparatively poor field of effort. If only you had had proper guidance—if you'd had someone behind you who could dispose of your products without the slightest possibility of detection—wouldn't it have been quite a different

story?"

Simon did not answer; and Nordsten went on, as if addressing the match: "If you had another chance to use your gifts in the same way, for even greater profits, but without any risk, wouldn't you see what a marvellous opportunity it was?"

The Saint sighed quite noiselessly—a deep slow inhalation of breath that took all the rich air of adventure into his lungs.

"I don't understand," he said stubbornly; and Nordsten's hard faded stare turned to him with a sudden resolution.

"Then I'll put it more plainly. You could do some work for me, Vickery. I'll pay you magnificently. I can make you richer than you've ever been even in your dreams. Do you want the chance or not?"

Simon shook his head. It was an effort.

"It's too risky," he said; but he spoke in a way that carried no conviction.

"I've promised to eliminate the risk," said Nordsten impatiently. "Listen—would you like a hundred thousand pounds?"

The Saint was silent for a longer time. His mouth opened, and he gaped at the financier more or less as he would have expected the real Tim Vickery to gape, in startlement and incredulity and a swelling hunger of greed; and not all of that was an effort. The same queer tingle of supernatural expectation touched his spine as had touched it when he discovered that quartet of detectives gathering in Bond Street eight hours ago; the same tiny pulse beat in his brain; but those were things that Ivar Nordsten could not see.

"What do I have to do?" he asked at last; and that humourless twitch moved the corners of the financier's thin mouth again.

"I'll show you."

Nordsten got up and opened the door. Following him out into the hall and up the broad oak staircase, the Sain't face relaxed into a fleeting smile that hardly reached beyond the corners of his eyes. It was, he reflected, only in keeping with the rest of his madcap existence that he should have been in such a situation at that moment—it was the only logical sequel to the crazy impulse which had put him into the driving-seat of that prehistoric taxi such a short while ago. Adventures were still to the adventurous. One saw the tail of a wild goose whisk by in the arid deserts of the commonplace, and grabbed it; and the chase led inevitably to a land flowing with ungodliness and boodle. And he would not have had his life ordered on any other lines. . . .

They went down a long corridor carpeted in rich purple; and Nordsten opened a door at the end. It gave on to a kind of small lobby, from which other doors opened on three sides. Nordsten opened the one on the left, and led him in.

It was a fairly large room with windows opening on to the falling view which the Saint had seen when he approached the house. There was a good rug on the floor and a couple of armchairs; but it was the rest of the furnishings which were unusual. Looking them over slowly, Simon grasped their purpose. The room was fitted up as a complete engraving and printing plant in miniature. There was a drawing-board with a green-shaded light, a work-bench at one end of which were set out orderly rows of tools and a neat stack of steel plates, an electric warming-plate, tubes of printing ink of every conceivable colour, and larger containers of acid and etching-ground. In one corner was a new hand-press of the most modern design, and in another corner were boxes of paper of various sizes.

"I think you'll find everything you could want," Nordsten said suavely; "but if you should require anything else, it will be procured as soon as you ask for it."

Simon moistened his lips.

"What do you want me to copy?" he asked.

Nordsten went to the drawing-board and picked up a small sheaf of papers which had been placed at one side of it.

"As many of these as you can manage," he said. "Some will be more difficult than others—perhaps you would do better to start on the easiest ones. You will have to work hard, but not so fast that you cannot do your best work. I will pay you one hundred thousand pounds as an indefinite retainer, and fifty thousand pounds for every plate you complete to my satisfaction. Do I take it that the proposition appeals to you?"

The Saint nodded. He held in his hands the sheaf of papers which Nordsten had given him—Italian National Bonds, Norwegian National Bonds, Argentine Conversion Bonds—a complete sample packet of international gilt-edged securities.

"All right," he said. "I'll start on Monday."

The financier shook his head.

"If you intend to accept my offer you must start at once. I have arranged your accommodation so that you can always be near your work. This is a small self-contained suite—there is a bedroom next door and a bathroom opposite. Anything you need to make yourself comfortable can be obtained in an hour

or two."

"But my sister——"

"You can write to her, or telephone whenever you like—there is an extension in your bedroom. Naturally you will not tell her what you are doing; but you will doubtless be able to explain your stay easily enough."

"I shall have to match the paper."

"It is already matched." Nordsten indicated the piles of boxes in the corner. "In fact, you have here sheets of the original papers. Many of the inks, also, are those which were used in the original printings. The only things I have been unable to obtain are the original plates; but those, of course, were destroyed. That is why I sent for you. Are you ready to start?"

There was something in his voice which made Simon look at him quietly for a moment; and then he remembered again that he was supposed to be Tim Vickery, and swallowed.

"Yes," he said. "I'm ready."

Ivar Nordsten smiled; but there was no more softening behind the smile than there had been behind any of the previous infinitesimal movements of his lips.

"Really, it's the only sensible decision," he said genially. "Well, Vickery, I'll leave you to make your preparations. There is a bell beside the fireplace, and it will be answered as soon as you ring. Perhaps you will have dinner with me?"

"Thank you," said the Saint.

When his host had gone, he threw his cigar into the fireplace and lighted a cigarette. Later on he lighted another. For half an hour he wandered about the workshop, stopping sometimes to examine the implements that had been provided for his use, stopping often to look at the sheaf of specimen bonds which he was asked to copy, with his brows knitted in a straight line of intense thought. And once his hand went to his hip for a reassuring feel of the weight of the automatic which he had not forgotten to put on when he dressed for the occasion; for there had been something in Ivar Nordsten's persuasive voice which told him that no Tim Vickery who refused the offer would have been allowed to take his knowledge of that strange proposition back into the open world.

Nordsten required forgeries of a round dozen government bonds of as many nationalities. Why? Not for any ordinary purpose to which such counterfeits might have been put—the very idea was absurd. What for, then?

He ran over everything he could recall about Nordsten. The name was not on the tip of every tongue, like the names of

Rockefeller or Morgan, but it was a name that was no less famous in other fields of finance; and it was part of Simon Templar's business to have at least a passing knowledge of those fields where millions are dealt with which are outside the limited ken of the average man in the street. Ivar Nordsten reaped in those fields; and the Saint had heard of him.

To the few people whose interests brought them in contact with the less publicised kingdoms of industry, he was known as the Paper King. Starting from one small factory in Sweden, he had built up a chain of production units which controlled practically the whole output of Scandinavia, Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Holland, until more than half the paper which was consumed in Europe was manufactured under his management. Not long ago he had taken over the most important mills in Austria and Denmark, and penetrated the British industry with an amount of capital which completed a virtual financial monopoly of the most considerable manufacturing and consuming countries in Europe. Not even content with that, he was rumoured to be negotiating for a series of loans and amalgamations which would link up the major concerns of Canada and the United States in the gigantic organisation of which he was dictator—an invulnerable world trust that would practically be able to write its own cheques on every industry in which paper was used, and which would in a few years lift his already fabulous fortune into astronomical figures. This was the Ivar Nordsten of whom Annette Vickery had never heard; but it is a curious commentary on this civilisation that the average man and woman hears of comparatively few of the great financial wizards until those wizards are trying to conjure themselves out of the dock in a criminal court. And this was the Ivar Nordsten who required a convicted forger to counterfeit twelve different series of foreign government bonds.

Simon Templar sat in the armchair and turned the specimen bonds over on his knee; and his second cigarette smouldered down till it scorched his fingers. There was only one possible explanation that he could see, and it made him feel giddy to think of it.

At one o'clock the saturnine butler brought him an excellent cold lunch on a tray, and asked him what he would like to drink. Simon suggested a bottle of Liebfraumilch, and it was brought at once.

"Mr. Nordsten told me to ask if you would like a letter posting to your sister," said the man, when he returned with the wine.

Simon thought quickly. He would be expected to communicate with his "sister" in some way, but there were obvious reasons why he could not ring up his own house.

"I'll give you a note right away, if you'll wait a sec," he said.

He scribbled a few conventional phrases on a sheet of notepaper that was produced for him, and addressed it to Miss Annette Vickery at an entirely fictitious address in North London.

At half-past two the butler came for the tray, asked him if there was anything else he wanted, and went out again. After a while the Saint strolled over to the drawing-board, pinned out one of the certificates on it, covered it with a sheet of tracing paper, and began to pick out a series of lines in the engraving. Beyond that point the mechanics of counterfeiting would stump him, but he thought it wise to produce something to show that he had made a start on his commission. The future would have to take care of itself.

He worked for two hours, and then the saturnine butler brought him tea. The Saint poured out a cup and carried it to the window with a cigarette. He had something else to think of; and that something was the sweltering spleen of Chief Inspector Teal, which by that time could scarcely be very far below the temperature at which its possessor would burst into flame if he scratched himself incautiously. Certainly the rear number-plate of the taxi had been unreadable, and no one could have positively identified the eccentric driver with the Saint; but Claud Eustace Teal had seen him and spoken with him in Bond Street only a few minutes before the disastrous events which had followed, and Simon was only too familiar with the suspicious and uncharitable grooves in which Mr. Teal's mind locomoted along its orbit. That would provide an additional complication which had been ordained from the beginning, but the Saint could see no way of avoiding it.

It was rather stuffy in the workshop, and the panorama of cool greenery which he could see from the window was immensely inviting. The Saint felt an overpowering desire to stretch his legs and take his problems out for a saunter in the fresh air; and he did not see how Ivar Nordsten could object. He went to the outer door of the suite;

and then, as he turned the handle, his heart stopped beating for an instant.

The door was locked; and he appreciated for the first time some of the qualities which made Ivar Nordsten such a successful man.

VI

"CURIOUSER and curiouser," said the Saint mildly, and went back to the armchair to do some more thinking.

He realised that when he had surmised that Nordsten would not have let him depart easily with his knowledge if he had refused his commission, he hadn't guessed the half of it. Nordsten would not let him depart easily with his knowledge anyhow. Simon had a sudden grim foreboding that there could be only one end, in Nordsten's mind, to that strange employment. He saw the financier's point of view very clearly, but it didn't help him far with his own plans.

He lighted another cigarette in the chain that had already filled two ashtrays, and strolled back to the window. The casements were only half opened, and he flipped one of the props off its peg and flung the window wide. Leaning out with his forearms folded on the sill to admire the view and take his fresh air as best he could, he saw a black-haired man with a scarred face walk round the corner of the house and look up. Simon restrained a prompt impulse to wave cheerily to him, and watched the man saunter up underneath the window and stop there seemingly wrapped in intense contemplation of a cluster of antirrhinums. Even then, he did not quite grasp the significance of the scarred stroller until the door behind him opened and he looked round to see the saturnine features of the butler.

"Did you require anything, Mr. Vickery?" he said.

Simon completed his turn and rested his elbows on the ledge behind him.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"I thought I heard you moving about, sir."

Simon nodded.

"I went to the door," he said, "and it was locked."

The butler's sallow features were expressionless.

"It was locked by Mr. Nordsten's instructions, sir. He wished to make certain that none of the staff except myself should enter these rooms. What is it you were requiring, sir?"

"I ran out of cigarettes," said the Saint casually. "Can you get me some?"

After the butler had gone Simon examined the window again, and found the tiny electric contacts in the upper hinge which had doubtless sounded a warning somewhere in the house when he moved the casement; and he realised that no estimate he had formed of Ivar Nordsten's thoroughness was too high.

At six o'clock the butler came in again with a complete outfit of evening clothes. Simon had a bath and changed—the suit fitted him very well—and at a quarter to seven the butler returned and ushered him down to the library with all the ceremony that might have been accorded to a particularly honoured guest. Nordsten was already there, with the broad ribbon of some foreign order across his white shirt-front. He rose with a smile.

"I'm glad Trusaneff was able to judge your size," he said, glancing at the set of the Saint's coat. "Will you have a Martini, or would you prefer sherry?"

To Simon Templar it was one of the most quietly macabre evenings in his experience. In the vast panelled dining-room, lighted only by clusters of candles, they sat at one end of a table which could have seated twenty without crowding. A periwigged footman stood behind each of their chairs like a guardian statue which only came to life in the act of forestalling any trivial need, and returned immediately afterwards to immobility. The butler stood at the end of the room, supervising nothing but the perfection of service: sometimes he would look up and move a finger, and one of the statues would respond in silent obedience. There were six courses, each served with a different wine, each taken with the solemn ritual of a formal banquet. Without seeming to be conscious that every word which was spoken thrummed eerily through the shadowy emptiness of the room, Nordsten talked as naturally as if all the vacant places at the long table had been filled; and Simon had to admit that he was a charming conversationalist. But he said nothing that gave the Saint any more information than he had already.

"I have always believed in the survival of the fittest," was his only illuminating remark. "Business men are often criticised for using 'sharp' methods; but after all, high finance is a kind of war, and in war you use the most effective weapons you can find, without considering the feelings of the enemy."

Nevertheless, when the Saint was back in his bedroom—the butler escorted him there on the pretext of finding out whether he desired to order anything special for breakfast—he felt that he had learned something, even if

that something was only a confirmation of what he had already deduced from quite a different angle. And this was that a man who was capable of putting on such a show of state for one insignificant guest, and who believed so clearly and logically in the survival of the fittest, would not find it hard to rationalise any expedient which helped him towards his unmistakable goal of power.

Abstractedly, the Saint took off his shoes, his collar and tie, his stiff shirt. Whatever benefits he might have derived from it, that dinner had put the finishing touch to his feeling of being a passive calf in process of fattening for the slaughter; and it was not a feeling that fitted very easily on his temperament. He pulled off his socks, because the night was sultry, and drifted about the room in his singlet and trousers, smoking a cigarette. As if he had never thought of it before, it came to him, as he paced up and down, that his bare feet were absolutely soundless on the carpet. Almost absentmindedly, he picked up the white waistcoat which he had discarded. In one pocket of it was a burglarious instrument with which he had taken the precaution of providing himself before he left his own home, with a nebulous eye to possible voyages of exploration on the Nordsten premises, and which he had thoughtfully transferred from his day suit when he changed. . . .

He watched, with the lights out, until the strip of light under the outer door of his suite turned black as the corridor lights were switched off; and then he waited half an hour longer before he set to work on the lock. He realised that it was not outside the realms of probability that the same thoroughness which had caused those minute electric contacts to be fitted to the windows might have provided some similar system of alarms on the door; but that was a risk which had to be taken, and possibly several glasses of Ivar Nordsten's excellent port on top of twelve hours' enforced passivity had made him a trifle light-headed. Every now and then he stopped, motionless, without even breathing, and listened for any whisper of sound that might betray a guard prowling around the passage; but he could hear nothing. And at last he was able to turn the handle noiselessly and slip out into the silent darkness of the house.

A tentative needle of light skimmed away from the Saint's hand, dabbed at the floor and walls, and vanished again. It came from the masked bulb of a tiny pocket torch which was another semi-burglarious instrument that he had brought with

him. And thereafter, with only that one brief glimpse of the route ahead to refresh his memory, he disappeared into the blackness like a roving ghost.

His objective, in so far as he had an objective at all, was the library where cocktails had been served before dinner. If there were any intriguing developments to be unearthed in that house, the library seemed the obvious place to begin a search for them; and he had always been a sublime optimist.

He reached the head of the staircase, and stopped there to listen. A pale blue glimmer of light came through the studio window on the stairway and achieved little more than taking the harsh deadness off the dark for half a flight. A faint musty smell touched the Saint's sensitive nostrils; and he stood for a moment breathing it silently, like a wild animal, with an invisible frown creasing his forhead. But the associations of it eluded him, and with a slight shrug he set one foot stealthily on the first downward step.

As he did so he heard the scratching.

It was a queer soft noise, like some very light-footed thing with nailed shoes pacing across a parquet floor. It seemed to take one or two steps, while he listened with his heart beating a shade faster; then it stopped; then it came again. And then the silence came down once more.

Simon remained motionless, a mere patch of shadow in the dark, so still that he could feel the blood pounding steadily in his veins. It came to him, with great clarity, that there were healthier places for him to be abroad at midnight than the house of Ivar Nordsten. He had a momentary vision of the very comfortable bed that was already turned down for him in the very comfortable bedroom to which he had been assigned, and wondered what on earth could have made him impervious to its very obvious enticement. But the scratching sound was not repeated; and at length, with a wry grin, he went on. He wouldn't stand much chance of completing his tour of investigation, he reflected ruefully, if a mouse could scare him so easily. . . .

At last he stepped down on the floor of the hall. An infinitesimal glimmer of the light from the stairway window still reached there—enough to take him to the library door without the use of his torch. Very gently he turned the handle; and as he did so he heard the scratching again.

In a flash he had whipped round and shot the pencil beam of his torch towards it. Even as he did so, he realised that his nerves had got the better of him,

but the impulse was too strong for reason. And as he turned, his right hand leapt to the automatic at his hip with a grim feeling that if by any chance the scratching had a human origin it would relieve him considerably to discover it.

The dimmed beam gave too feeble a light to show him any details. He saw nothing but a black shadow which filled one far corner, and a pair of eyes that caught the light and held it in two steady yellowish reflections as large as walnuts; and one of the happiest moments of his life began when he had got through the library door and shut it behind him.

Breathing a trifle deeply, he fished a cigarette out of his pocket and lighted it, keeping his flashlight switched on. If complete disaster had been the price, he couldn't have denied his nerves that time-honoured consolation. Whatever the black shadow with the yellow eyes might be, he felt that his system could stand a snifter of tobacco and an interval of thoughtful repose before looking at it again. Meanwhile, he was on the sanctuary side of the library door, and he was stubbornly resolved to make the most of it. His torch showed him that the curtains were drawn, and with a reckless movement of his hand he switched on the lights and turned to a survey of the room.

Only the immutable law of averages can account for what followed. If a man looks for things often enough, it is reasonable to assume that at some time or other he must stumble on the right hiding-place at the first attempt; and the Saint had searched for things often enough in his life, even if on that occasion he didn't know what he was looking for.

The toe of one bare foot was kicking meditatively at the edge of of the carpet. The corner rolled over. His thoughts ran, more or less: "Nothing important would be left out for any inquisitive servant to get hold of. There isn't a safe. It might be a dummy bookcase, like I've got. But excavations are also possible. . . ."

Somehow, he found himself looking down at a trap-door cut in the oak planking of the floor.

It lifted easily. Underneath was a hinged stone slab with an iron ring-bolt, smooth and unrusted. Without hesitation he took hold of it, and lifted. It required all his strength to raise the slab, but he managed it.

He looked down into black darkness; but from the bottom of the darkness came a faint sound of shuffling movement. With a creepy tingle working across his scalp, he picked up his torch again and sent the beam

down the shaft.

Ten feet below him, a face looked up with dull staring eyes that blinked painfully even in the faint ray of his flashlight. There was something hideously familiar about it, as if it were the blanched wreck of a face which he ought to know. And in another second his blood ran cold as he realised that it was the face of Ivar Nordsten.

VII

The face was not quite the same. The nose was less dominant, the complexion had a yellow tinge which the financier's did not have, the eyes lacked the faded brightness which Nordsten's possessed; but it was recognisable. It had given the Saint such a shock that he found it difficult to speak naturally.

"Hullo, sunshine," he said at length. "And who are you?"

The man's mouth worked hungrily, like an animal's.

"All right," he said, in a curiously stiff hoarse whisper, as if he had half forgotten how to use his voice. "I'm used to it now. You can't make me suffer any more."

"Who are you?" Simon repeated.

"I'm *you,*" said the man huskily. "I know now. I've thought it all out. I'm you—Nordsten!"

The Saint's nerves were steady enough now. Somehow, that last shock had been a homœopathic dose, wiping out everything else; he was left with the dizzy certainty that the trail had turned into a stranger course than anything he had dreamed of, and with a grim curiosity to find out where it led.

"I'm here to help you, you fathead," he said. "Tell uncle what it's all about."

The man below him laughed, a horrible quivering dry cackle which sent an uncanny chill down the Saint's spine, as if a spider had crawled there, in spite of the recovered steadiness of his nerves.

"Help me! Ha-ha! That's funny. Help me like you've been helping me for two years. Help me to keep alive, so that I can die at the right time! I know. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Then the wild voice fell to a whisper. "*Help,*" it breathed, with a fearful intensity. "How long? How long?"

"Listen," said the Saint urgently. "I——"

And then, as if his command had turned back on himself, he broke off and listened. He could hear the scratching again. It was outside the library door—on the door itself. . . . There was a faint thud; and then an instant's electric silence, while he strained his ears for he knew not what. . . . And then, shattering the stillness

of the house, came a frightful coughing scream that rang up and down the scale in an eldritch howl of vocal savagery that stopped the breath in his throat.

Looking down stupidly through the trap-door, Simon saw the parchment face of the man who looked like Nordsten turn whiter. The dull eyes dilated, and the stiff unnatural voice rose in a sobbing cry.

"No, no, no, no," it shrieked. "Not now! Not now! I didn't mean it. I'm not ready yet! I'm not——"

The hairs prickled on the nape of Simon's neck; and then, with an effort that hardened his eyes to mere slits of Arctic blue, he got up from his knees and lifted the heavy stone trap-door again.

"I'll see you later," he said shortly, and lowered the trap much more quickly than he had raised it.

In another second he had fitted the square of dummy parquet over it, and he was rolling out the carpet again to cover up the traces of his inspection. Whatever else his curiosity might demand to know, there was the screeching shadow with the yellow eyes to be accounted for first—everyone in the house must have been awakened by that unearthly yell,and he would achieve nothing by being discovered where he was. Whatever it might be, the Thing in the hall had to be dealt with first, and he preferred to take it on the run rather than let his nerves get the better of him again. With his automatic in his hand, he went back to the door and switched out the lights. No one would ever know what it cost him to turn the handle of the door with that screaming horror waiting for him on the other side, but he did it; and his nerves were like ice as he drew the door sharply back and waited for whatever his fate might be.

Something soft and yet heavy hissed past him and landed on the parquet beside the central rug with the same scratching noise as he had heard before, and once again his nostrils twitched to the queer musty odour which they had detected on the stairs. In the pitch darkness he heard the claws of the beast scrabbling for a turning hold on the polished oak, and kicked out instinctively with his bare foot. His toes bedded into something furry and muscular, and for the second time that fiendish worrying yell wailed through the blackness.

Simon whipped up his gun; but something like a hot iron ripped down his forearm before he could fire, and the automatic was brushed effortlessly out of his hand. He felt hot fetid breath on his face, and smashed his fist into something soft and damp; and then he went down under

the clawing spitting weight of the brute with its shrill snarl of fury ringing in his ears.

More by luck than judgment he found the animal's throat with his hands; and probably it was that fluke, and the second or two's reprieve it gave him, which saved him from serious injury.

"*Sheba!*"

The lights had gone up in the hall, and he heard running footsteps. He had never been so breathlessly thankful to hear anything in his life. A whip lashed, and the huge black panther on top of him roared again and stepped back, turning its head with bared fangs. Simon took his chance and rolled clear —it was the fastest roll he had ever performed in his acrobatic career.

"*Back!*" shouted Nordsten furiously, and lashed at the panther again.

It was one of the most amazing demonstrations of brutal fearlessness which Simon had ever witnessed. Nordsten simply advanced step by step, swinging the wire-tipped rawhide back and forth in a steady rhythm of flailing punishment; and as he went forward, the panther went back. Quite obviously it had never been tamed, and no attempt had ever been made to tame it. Nordsten dominated it by nothing but his own savage courage. Its yellow eyes blazed with the most horrible intelligent hatred that the Saint had ever dreamed of seeing in the eyes of an animal; it clawed and bit at the slashing whip with deep growls of murderous rage; but it went back. Nordsten's face was black with anger, and he had no more pity than fear. He drove the brute right across the hall into a corner, lashed it half a dozen times more when it could retreat no farther—and then turned his back on it. It crouched there, staring after him, with a steady rumbling of frightful viciousness burring in its throat.

"You're lucky to be alive, Vickery," Nordsten said harshly, curling his whip in his big white hands.

He was in his pyjamas and dressing - gown — Simon had known very few financiers who could be impressive in that costume, but Nordsten was.

The Saint nodded, dabbing his handkerchief over the deep claw-groove in his bare forearm.

"I was just coming to the same conclusion." he remarked lightly. "Have you got any more docile pets like that around the place?"

"What were you doing down here?" answered Nordsten sharply; and Simon remembered that he was still supposed to be Tim Vickery.

"I wanted a drink," he ex-

plained. "I thought all the servants would have been in bed by this time, so I didn't like to ring for it. I just came down to see if I could find anything. I was halfway down the stairs when that thing started chasing me——"

Nordsten's faded bright eyes looked away to the left, and Simon saw that the saturnine butler was standing on the stairs at a safe distance, with a revolver clutched in his hand.

"You forgot to lock the door, Trusaneff?" Nordsten said coldly.

The man licked his lips.

"No, sir——"

"It wasn't locked, anyway," said the Saint blankly.

Nordsten looked at the butler for a moment longer; then at the Saint. Simon met his gaze with an expression of honest perplexity, and Nordsten turned away abruptly and went past him into the library, switching on the lights. He saw the automatic lying in the middle of the carpet, and picked it up.

"Is this yours?"

"Yes." Simon blinked, and shifted his eyes with an air of mild consternation. "I—I always carry it now, and—— Well, when that animal started——"

"I see." Nordsten's genial nod of understanding was very quick. He glanced at the Saint's gashed arm. "You'll need a bandage on that. Trusaneff will attend to it. Excuse me."

He spoke those few words as if with their utterance the episode was finally concluded. Somehow, the Saint found himself outside the library door while Nordsten closed it from the inside.

"This way, please, Mr. Vickery," said the butler, without moving from his safe position on the lower flight of stairs.

Simon felt for his cigarette-case and walked thoughtfully across the hall. Through another half-open door he caught a glimpse of the scared features of the battle-scarred warrior who had paraded under his window, peering out from an equally safe position. The black panther crouched in the corner where Nordsten had left it, lashing its tail in sullen silence. . . .

Altogether a very exciting wind-up to a pleasant social evening, reflected the Saint; if it was the wind-up. . . . He remembered that Nordsten had carelessly omitted to give him back his automatic when ushering him so smoothly out of the library, and realised that he would have felt a lot happier if the financier had been less pointedly forgetful. He also remembered that either Annette or Patricia should have telephoned him that night, and wondered why there had been no message. Teal might have been responsible—so far as Simon knew, that **persis-**

tent detective had not been aware of his latest acquisition in the way of real estate; but there had been no secrecy about the transaction, and it would have been perfectly simple for Mr. Teal to discover it after a certain amount of time. Or else they might have tried to telephone, and Nordsten or one of his servants might have been the barrier. That also was possible, since he had already been allowed to write a letter which had doubtless been read before it was posted. He was developing a profound respect for Ivar Nordsten's thoroughness. . . .

"Vickery."

It was Nordsten's voice; and the Saint stopped, and saw the financier standing at the foot of the stairs.

"I'd like to see you again for a moment, if your arm can wait."

There was no real question of whether his arm could wait; and Simon turned with a smile.

"Of course."

He went down the stairs again. Trusaneff halted on the last flight, and Simon crossed the hall alone.

Nordsten was standing by the desk when the Saint entered the library, and the panther was crouching at his feet. Simon saw that the carpet was rolled back from the trap-door, and the financier was holding his gun in his hand. He realised that he had been exceedingly careless; but he allowed nothing but a natural puzzlement to appear on his face.

"You tell me that Sheba started chasing you when you were on the stairs, and you tried to get in here to escape." Nordsten said, with a curious flat timbre in his voice.

"That's right," Simon answered.

"Then can you explain this?"

Nordsten pointed his whip at the floor; and Simon looked down, and saw the stub of a cigarette lying beside the trap-door—that same cigarette which his tingling nerves had forced him to light when he got inside the room, and which he had unconsciously trodden out when the demoniac snarl of the panther disturbed him in his investigations—and a few little splashes of grey ash around it.

"I don't understand," he said, with a frown of perfect bewilderment.

The financier's faded bright eyes were fixed on his steadily.

"None of my servants smoke, and I only smoke cigars."

"I still don't know why you should ask me," Simon said.

"Is your name Vickery?"

"Of course it is."

Nordsten stared at him for a few seconds longer.

"You're a liar," he said at length, with absolute calm.

Simon did not answer, and knew that there was no answer to make. He admitted nothing, continuing to gape at Nordsten with the same expression of helpless perplexity which the real Tim Vickery would have worn; but he knew that he was only carrying on mechanically with a bluff that had long since been called. It made no difference.

The thing that surprised him a little was Nordsten's complete restraint. He would have expected some show of emotion, some manifestation of nerves, fear, anger, even insensate viciousness; but there was none of those. The financier was as rock-still as if he had been contemplating an ordinary obstacle which had arisen in the course of a normal and respectable business campaign—almost as if he had already envisaged the obstacle and sketched out a rough plan of remedy, and was simply considering the remedy again in detail, to make sure that it contained no flaws. And Simon Templar, remembering the poor half-crazy wretch under the trap, had an eerie presentiment that perhaps this was only the barest truth.

Nordsten spoke only one revealing sentence.

"I didn't think it would come so soon," he said, speaking aloud but only to himself; and his voice was quiet and almost childlike.

Then he looked at the Saint again with his dispassionate and empty eyes, and the gun in his hand moved slightly.

"Lift up the trap, please . . . Vickery," he said.

Simon hesitated momentarily; but the gun was aimed on him quite adequately, and Nordsten was too far away for a surprise attack. With a slight shrug he moved the square of parquet aside and locked his hands in the ring-bolt of the heavy stone door. He lifted it with a strong quiet heave, and laid it back on the floor.

"This is lots of fun," he murmured. "What do we do now—wiggle our ears and pretend to be rabbits?"

The financier ignored him. He raised his voice slightly and called:

"Erik!"

In the silence that followed, Simon listened to the sounds of stumbling movement in the cave under the floor; and presently he saw the head of the man who looked like Nordsten coming up out of the hole. The man was climbing up some sort of ladder which the Saint had not noticed, taking each rung with a shaky effort such as an old man might have made, as if his limbs had

grown pitifully feeble from long disuse. As he appeared under the full open light, Simon was even more amazed at the resemblance between the two men. There were minor differences, it was true; but most of them could be accounted for by the unimaginably frightful years of imprisonment which Erik had endured in that lightless pit. Even in stature they were almost identical. Simon had a moment's recollection of the man's stiff husky voice saying: *"I'm you. I know you . . . I'm you—Nordsten!"* And he shivered in the sudden chill of understanding.

The man had climbed out at last. His glazed eyes, tensed painfully in the brilliant light, fell on the black panther, and he swayed weakly, clutching the collar of his ragged shirt with a trembling hand. And then he mastered himself.

"All right," he said, with a shuddering gasp. "I'm not afraid. I didn't mean you to see me afraid. But when you opened the door just now—and the thing yelled—I forgot. But I'm not afraid any more. I'm not afraid, damn you!"

Nordsten's faded eyes, without pity, glanced at the Saint.

"So—you had opened the trap," he remarked, almost casually.

"Maybe I had," Simon responded calmly. He was not meeting Nordsten's gaze, and he only answered perfunctorily. He was looking at the man Erik; and he went on speaking to him, very clearly and steadily, trying to strike a spark of recognition from that terribly injured brain. "I was the bloke who said hullo to you just now, Erik. It wasn't Brother Ivar. It was me."

The man stared at him sightlessly; and Nordsten moved nearer to the door. The great black panther rose and stretched itself. It padded after him, watching him with its oblique malignant eyes; and Nordsten took the whip in his right hand. His voice rang out suddenly.

"Sheba!"

The whip whistled through the air and curled over the animal's sleek flanks in a terrific blow.

"Kill!"

The whip fell again. Growling, the panther started forward. A third and a fourth lash cracked over its body like the sound of pistol shots, and it stopped and turned its head.

Simon will never forget what followed.

It was not clear to him at the time, though the actual physical fact was as vivid as a nightmare. He knew that he faced certain death, but it had come on him so quickly that he had no chance to grasp the idea completely. The man Erik was standing beside him, white-faced, his body

rigid and quivering, his lips stubbornly compressed and the breath hissing jerkily through his nostrils. *He* knew. But the Saint, with his eyes narrowed to slits of steel and his muscles flexed for the hopeless combat, only understood the threat of death instinctively. He saw what was happening long before reason and comprehension caught up with it.

The head of the beast turned; and again the cruel whip cut across its back. And then—it could only have been that the deep-sown hate of the beast conquered its fear, and its raging blood-lust burst into the deeper channel. The twist of its magnificent rippling body was too quick for the eye to follow. It sprang, a streak of burnished ebony flying through the air—not towards the Saint or Erik, but away from them. Nordsten's gun banged once; and then the cry that broke from his lips as he went down was drowned in the rolling thunder of the panther's hate.

VIII

"Say," pleaded Mr. Uniatz bashfully, plucking up the courage to seek illumination on a point which had been worrying him for some hours, "is a nightjar de t'ing——"

"No, it isn't," said Patricia Holm hurriedly. "It's a kind of bird."

"Oh, a boid!" Hoppy's mouth stretched horizontally in a broad grin of overwhelming relief. 'I t'ought it couldn't of been what I t'ought it was."

Patricia sighed.

"Why on earth did you have to think about nightjars at all, anyway?"

"Well, it was dis way. Before de Saint scrammed, after he made me a pansy bootlegger, he said my accent reminded him of a nightjar callin' to its mate——"

"He must have been thinking of a nightingale, Hoppy," said the girl kindly.

She lighted a cigarette and strolled over to the window, watching the dusk deepening down the glade of bracken and trees. Annette Vickery gazed after her with a feeling that was oddly akin to awe. Annette herself couldn't help knowing, frankly, that she was pretty; but this slim fair girl who seemed to be the Saint's partner in outlawry had an enchanting beauty like nothing that she had ever seen before. That alone might have made her jealous after the fashion even of the nicest women; but in Patricia Holm it was only an incidental feature. She had a repose, a quiet understanding confidence, which was the only thing that made hours of waiting tolerable.

She had come in towards mid-

day.

"I'm Patricia," she said; and with that she was introduced.

She heard the story of the night before and the morning after, and laughed.

"I expect it seems like the end of the world to you," she said, "but it isn't very new to me. I wondered what had happened to Simon when I blew into the apartment this morning and found he hadn't been in all night. But he always has been daft—I suppose you've had plenty of time to find that out. How about a spot of sherry, kid—d'you think that would do you good?"

"You talk like a man," said Annette.

It was clearly meant for a compliment; and Patricia smiled.

"If I talk like a Saint," she said softly, "it's only natural."

She had a serene faith in the Saint which removed the last excuse for anxiety. If she had doubts, she kept them to herself. Orace served an excellent cold lunch. They bathed in the swimming-pool, sunned themselves afterwards in deck-chairs, had tea brought out on the terrace. The time passed; until Patricia stood at the window and watched night creeping down over the garden.

"I'll make some Old Fashioneds," she said.

In the glow of that most insidiously potent of all apéritifs, it was not so difficult to keep anxiety at bay for another hour and more. Presently Orace announced dinner. It was quite dark when they left the table and went into the study.

"I suppose we might telephone now," said Patricia at length.

She took up the telephone and gave the number calmly. It was then nearly nine o'clock. In a short while a man's voice answered.

"Can I speak to Mr. Vickery?" he asked.

"Who is that, please?"

"This is his sister speaking."

"I will inquire, madam. Will you hold on?"

She waited, and presently the man came back.

"Mr. Vickery is engaged in a very important conference with Mr. Nordsten, madam, and cannot be disturbed. Can I take a message?"

"When will the conference be over?" asked Patricia steadily.

"I don't know, madam."

'I'll call up again later," said Patricia, and replaced the microphone on its bracket.

She tilted herself back in the desk chair and blew smoke at the wall in front of her. It was Hoppy Uniatz, removing his mouth temporarily from a glass of whisky, who crashed in where angels might have feared to

tread.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "who's been rubbed out?"

"I can't get him just now," said Patricia evenly. 'We'll call again before we go to bed. How about a game of poker?"

"I remember," said Mr. Uniatz wistfully, "one time I played strip poker wit' a couple broads on Toity-Toid Street. De blonde one had just drawn to a bob-tailed straight an' raised me a pair of pants——"

The glances which turned in his direction would have withered any man whose hide had less in common with that of the African rhinoceros; but Hoppy's disreputable reminiscence served to relieve the strain. Somehow, the time went on. The girls smoked and talked idly; and Mr. Uniatz, finding his anecdotes disrespectfully received, relapsed into fluent silence and presently went out of the room. After a while he returned, bearing with him a fresh bottle of whisky which he had discovered somewhere and succeeded in abstracting from under Orace's vigilant eye. At half-past eleven Patricia telephoned Hawk Lodge again.

"Mr. Vickery has gone to bed, madam," said the butler suavely. 'He was very tired, and left orders that he was not to be awakened. He wrote you a letter which I have just posted, madam. You should receive it in the morning."

"Thank you," said Patricia slowly, and rang off.

She turned round serenely to the others.

"We're out of luck," she reported. 'Well, there's nothing we can do about it. We'll have some news in the morning—and I'm ready for bed."

"You're very brave," said Annette, seeing more than Hoppy Uninatz would ever be capable of seeing.

Patricia laughed shortly, and put an arm round her.

"My dear, if you'd known the Saint as long as I have, you'd have given up worrying. I've seen him get people out of messes that would make yours look like a flea-bite. I've seen him get himself out of far worse trouble than anything I think he's in now. The man's simply made that way. . . ."

She might have been going to say more, but she didn't; for at that moment a bell rang faintly at the back of the house. Annette looked up at her quickly, and for a second even Mr. Uniatz forgot that he was grasping a bottle of whisky which was as yet only half empty. But Patricia shook her head with a very tiny smile.

"Simon wouldn't ring," she said.

They listened, and heard

Orace's dot-and-carry footfalls crossing the hall. The front door opened, and there was a sound of other feet treading over the threshold. A voice could be heard inquiring for Mr. Templar.

"Mr. Templar ain't 'ere," Orace said brusquely.

"We'll wait for him," stated the voice imperturbably.

'Like 'ell you will," retorted Orace's most belligerent accents. "You'll wait ahtside on the bleedin' doorstep, that's wot you'll do——"

There were the sounds of a scuffle; and Mr. Uniatz, who understood one thing if there was nothing else he understood, gave a surprising demonstration of his right to his nickname. He hopped out of his chair with a leap which an athletic grasshopper might have envied, reaching for his hip. Patricia caught the other girl by the arm.

"Through the bookcase — quick!" she ordered. "Hoppy, leave the door shut, or we can't open this one."

She bundled Annette through the secret panel, saw that it was properly closed, and grabbed Hoppy's wrist as he snatched at the door-handle again.

"Put that gun away, you idiot," she said. "That'll only make things worse."

Hoppy's jaw fell open aggrievedly.

"But say——"

"Don't say," snapped Patricia, in a venomous whisper. "Get the darn' thing back in your pocket and leave this to me."

She thrust him aside and opened the door herself. Outside in the hall, Orace was engaging in a heroic but one-sided wrestling match in the arms of Chief Inspector Teal and another detective. As she emerged, one of his boots landed effectively on Mr. Teal's right shin, and drew a yelp of anguish in response. Patricia's cool voice cut across the brawl like a blade of honey.

"Good evening — er — gentlemen," she said.

The struggle abated slightly, and Orace's purple face screwed round out of the tangle with its walrus moustache whiffling.

"Sorl right, miss," he panted valiantly. "You jus' wait till I've kicked these plurry perishers down the thundering' 'ill——"

"I'm afraid they'd only come back again," said Patricia regretfully. "They're like black beetles —once you've got them in the house, you can't get rid of them. Take a rest, Orace, and let me talk to them. How are you, Mr. Teal?"

Mr. Teal glared pinkly at Orace and shook him off. He picked up his bowler hat, which had been dislodged from his head during the mêlée and had subsequently been somewhat

trampled on, and glared at Orace again. He appeared to have some difficulty in controlling his voice.

"Good evening, Miss Holm," he said at last, breathing deeply and detaching his eyes from Orace's stormy countenance with obvious difficulty. "I have a search-warrant——"

"You must be collecting them," murmured Patricia sweetly. "Come in and tell me what it's all about this time."

She turned and went back into the study, and Mr. Teal and his satellite followed. Mr. Teal's eyes discovered Mr. Uniatz, and transferred their smouldering malevolence to him. It is a regrettable fact that Mr. Teal's soul was not at that moment overflowing with courtesy and goodwill towards men; and Mr. Uniatz had crossed his path on another unfortunate occasion.

"I've seen you before," Teal said abruptly. "Who are you?"

"Tim Vickery," replied Hoppy promptly, with an air of triumph.

"Yes?" barked the detective. "You're the forger, eh?"

There was something so consistently unfriendly in his china-blue gaze that Hoppy reached around nervously for the whisky bottle. He had been let down. This was not what the Saint had told him. He had to think, and that always gave him a pain somewhere between his ears.

"I ain't no forger, boss," he protested. "I'm a fairy."

"You're *what?*" blared the detective.

"A bootlegger," said Mr. Uniatz, gulping hastily. "I mean, de udder business is my perfession. I got an accent like a nightingale——"

Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal grabbed at the scattering fragments of his temper with both hands. If only he could master the art of remaining tranquil under the goad of that peculiar form of baiting in which not only the Saint indulged, but which seemed to infect all his associates like a malignant disease, he might yet be able to score for Law and Order the deciding point in that ancient feud. He had missed points before by letting insult and injury get under his skin—the Saint's malicious wit had stung him, ragged him, baited him, rattled him, tied him up in a series of clove-hitches and stood him on his head and rolled him over again, till he had no more chance of victory than a mad bull would have had against an agile hornet.

But this man in front of him, whose calloused throat apparently allowed whisky to flow through it like milk, was not the Saint. The style of badinage might be similar—in fact, it is interesting to record that to

Teal's overwrought imagination, the style was almost identical—but the man behind it could not conceivably be the same. In any one century, two men like the Saint could not possibly have been born. The earth could not have survived it.

And Mr. Teal had a point to make. The man with the whisky bottle had given it to him, open-handed. It was a point which annihilated all the routine plans he had made for that raid on which he had barely started to embark—a point so free and brazen that Mr. Teal's respiratory system went haywire at the sight of it.

"Your name's Vickery, is it?" he said, in the nearest he could get to his normal sleepy voice; and Mr. Uniatz, after an appealing glance at Patricia, nodded dumbly. "Then why is it," Teal flung at him suddenly, "that when Miss Holm tried to ring you up a quarter of an hour ago, she was told that you were in bed and asleep?"

Mr. Uniatz opened his mouth, and, finding that nothing at all would come out of it, decided to put something in and hope for the best. He pushed the neck of the whisky bottle between his teeth and swallowed feverishly; and Patricia spoke for him.

"That was a mistake," she explained. "Mr. Vickery came in just a minute or two after I telephoned."

"Dat's right, boss," agreed Mr. Uniatz, grasping the point with an injudicious speed which trickled a couple of gills of good alcohol wastefully down his tie. "A minute or two after the telephones, I came in."

Mr. Teal gazed at him balefully.

"Then why is it," he rasped, "that the man I had waiting outside the front gate while I was at the telephone exchange didn't see you?"

"I come in de back door," said Hoppy brightly.

"And the man I had at the back door didn't see you either," said Chief Inspector Teal.

Hoppy Uniatz sank down into the nearest chair, and tacitly retired from the competition. His brow was ploughed into furrows of honest effort, but he was out of the race. He had a resentful feeling that he was being fouled, and the referee wasn't doing anything about it. He had done his best, but that wasn't no use if a guy didn't get a break.

"It sounds even funnier," Mr. Teal said trenchantly, "when I tell you that another Tim Vickery was pulled in for questioning just before I left London, and he hasn't been let out yet." His sharp glittering eyes between the pink creases of fat went back to Patricia Holm. "I'll be interested to have a look at

this third Tim Vickery, who's asleep at Hawk Lodge," he said. "But if the Saint isn't here, I can make a good guess who *he's* going to be!"

"You do your guessing," answered Patricia, as the Saint would have answered; but her heart was thumping.

"I'll do more than that," said the detective grimly.

He turned on his heel and waddled out of the room; and his silent companion followed him. Patricia went after them to the front door. There was a police car standing in the drive, and Teal stopped beside it and called two names. After a slight interval, two large overcoated men materialised out of the dark.

"You two stay here," commanded Teal. "Inside the house. Don't let anyone out who's inside, or anyone else who comes in while I'm away—on any excuse. I'll be back shortly."

He climbed in, and his taciturn equerry took the wheel. In another moment the police car was scrunching down the drive, carrying Claud Eustace Teal on his ill-omened way.

IX

Ivar Nordsten was dead. He must have been dead even before Simon Templar snatched his automatic away from under the lashing, tearing claws of the panther and sent two slugs through its heart at point-blank range. He lay on the shining oak close to the door, a curiously twisted and mangled shape which was not pleasant to look at. The maddened beast that had turned on him had wreaked its vengeance with fiendish speed; but it had not wrought neatly. . . .

The Saint straightened up, cold-eyed, and looked across at Erik. The man was staring motionlessly at the black glossy body of the dead panther, and at the still and crumpled remains of Ivar Nordsten; and the dull glazed sightlessness had been wiped out of his eyes. His throat was working mutely, and the tears were raining down the yellow parchment of his cheeks.

Footsteps were coming across the hall; and Simon remembered the three shots which had been fired. It was not impossible that they might have been mistaken for cracks of the whip; but the end of the panther's savage snarling had begun a sudden deep silence which would demand some explanation. With a quick deliberate movement Simon opened the door and stood behind it. He raised his voice in a muffled imitation of Nordsten's.

"Trusaneff!"

The butler's footsteps entered the room. The Saint saw him

come into view and stop to stare at the man Erik. Very gently he pushed the door to behind the unsuspecting man, reversed his gun, and struck crisply with the butt. . . .

Then he completed the closing of the door, and took out his cigarette-case. For the moment, there was no reason why he shouldn't. Certainly, the battle-scarred gladiator with the passionate interest in antirrhinums remained, together with Heaven knew how many more of Nordsten's curious staff; but to all outward appearances Ivar Nordsten was closeted with his butler, and there was no cause for anyone else to be inquisitive. In fact, Simon had already gathered that inquisitiveness was not a vice in which Nordsten's retainers had ever been encouraged.

He lighted a cigarette and looked again at the financier's erstwhile prisoner.

"Erik," he said quietly.

The man did not move; and Simon walked across and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Erik," he repeated, and the man's tear-streaked face turned helplessly. "Was Ivar your brother?"

"Yes."

The Saint nodded silently, and turned away. He went over to the desk and sat in the chair behind it, smoking thoughtfully. The demise of Ivar Nordsten meant nothing to him personally—it was all very unfortunate, and must have annoyed Ivar a good deal, but Simon was dispassionately unable to feel that the amenities of the world had suffered an irreparable loss. He had it to thank for something else, which was the shock that had probably saved Erik's reason. Equally well, perhaps, it might have struck the final blow at that pitifully tottering brain; but it had not. The man who had looked at him and answered his question just now was not the quivering half-crazed wretch who had looked up into the beam of his flashlight out of that medieval dungeon under the floor: it was a man to whom sanity was coming back, who understood death and illogical grief—who would presently talk, and answer other questions. And there would be questions enough to answer.

Simon was too sensible to try to hurry the return. When his cigarette was finished he got up and found his torch, and went down into the pit. It was only a small brick-lined cellar, with no other outlet, about twelve feet square. There was a rusty iron bedstead in one corner, and a small table beside it. On the table were a couple of plates on which were the remains of some food, and the table-top was spot-

ted with blobs of candle-wax. Under the table there was an earthenware jar of water and an enamel mug. A small grating high up in one wall spoke for some kind of ventilating system, a gutter along one side for some kind of drainage, but the filth and smell were indescribable. The Saint was thankful to get out again.

When he returned to the library he found that Erik had taken down one of the curtains to cover up the body of his brother. The man was sitting in a chair with his head in his hands, but he looked up quite sanely as the Saint's feet trod on the parquet.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I didn't understand you just now."

Simon smiled faintly, and went for his cigarette-case again.

"I don't blame you, brother," he said. "If I'd spent two years in that rat-hole, I guess I should have been a bit scatty myself."

The man nodded. His eyes roved involuntarily to the huddled heap under the rich curtain, and returned to the Saint's face.

"He was always clever," he said, as if reciting an explanation which had been distilled through his mind so often during those dreadful years of darkness that nothing was left for the starkest essence, pruned to the barest minimum of words, to be spoken without apology or preface. "But he only counted results. They justified the means. His monopoly was built up on trickery and ruthlessness. But he was thorough. He was ready to be found out. That's why he kept me—down there. If necessary, there was to be a tragic accident. Ivar Nordsten would be killed by his panther. But I was to have been the body, and he had another identity to step into."

"Did he hate you very much?"

"I don't think so. He had no reason to. But he had a kink. I was the perfect instrument for his scheme, and so he was ready to use me. Nothing counted against his own power and success."

It was more or less a confirmation of the amazing theory which the Saint had built up in his own mind. But there was one other thing he had to know.

"What is supposed to have happened to you?" he asked.

"My sailing boat capsized in Sogne Fjord. I was supposed to be in it, but my body was never found. Ivar told me."

The Saint smoked for a minute or two, gazing at the ceiling; and then he said: 'What are you going to do now?"

Erik shrugged weakly.

"How do I know? I've had no time to think. I've been dead for two years. All this——"

The gesture of his hands concluded what he could not put into words, but the Saint understood. He nodded sympathetically; but he was about to make an answer when the telephone bell rang.

Simon's eyes settled into blue pools of quiet, and he put the cigarette in his lips again rather slowly in a moment's passive hesitation. And then, with an infinitesimal reckless steadying of his lips, he stretched out a lazy arm and lifted the instrument from its rack.

"Hullo," said a girl's voice. "Can I speak to——"

"Pat!" The Saint straightened up suddenly, and smiled. "I was wondering why I hadn't heard from you."

"I tried to get through twice before, but——"

"I guessed it, old darling," said the Saint quickly. He had detected the faint tremor of strain in her voice, and his eyes had gone hard again. "Never mind that just now, lass. I've got no end of news for you, but I think you've got some for me. Let's have it."

"Teal's been here," she said. "He's on his way to Hawk Lodge right now. Are you all right, boy?"

He laughed; and his laughter held all of the hell-for-leather lilt which rustled through it most blithely when trouble was racing towards him like a charging buffalo.

"I'm fine," he said. "But after I've seen Claud Eustace, I'll be sitting on top of the world. Get the whisky away from Hoppy, sweetheart, and hide it somewhere for me. I'll be seein' ya!"

He dropped the microphone back on its perch and stood up, crushing his cigarette into an ashtray, seventy-four inches of him, lean and dynamic and unconquerable, with a dancing light shifting across devil-may-care blue eyes.

"Listen, Erik," he said, standing in front of the man who looked so much like Nordsten, "a little while ago I tried to tell you who I was. Do you think you can take it in now?"

The man nodded.

"I'm Simon Templar. They call me the Saint. If it was only two years ago when Ivar put you away, you must have heard of me."

The other's quick gasp was sufficient answer; and the Saint swept on, with all the mad persuasion which he could command in his voice, crowding every gift of inspired personality which the gods had given him into the task of carrying away the man who looked like Nordsten on the stride of his own impetuous decision.

"I'm here because I pretended to be a man named Vickery. I

pretended to be Vickery because Ivar wanted him for some mysterious job, and I wanted to find out what it was. I heard about that from Vickery's sister, because I got her away last night in London after she'd been arrested by the police. If I hadn't butted in here, Ivar wouldn't have rushed into your murder without a proper stage setting: he wouldn't have been killed, but you would. If you like to look at it that way, you're free and alive at this moment for the very same reason that the police are on their way here to arrest me now."

"I don't understand it altogether, even yet," Erik Nordsten said huskily. "But I know I must owe you more than I can ever repay."

"That's all you need to understand for the next half-hour," said the Saint. "And even then you're wrong. You can repay it—and repay yourself as well."

There was something in the quiet clear power of his voice, some quality of contagious urgency, which brought the other man stumbling up out of his chair without knowing why. And the Saint caught him by the shoulders and swung him round.

"I'm an outlaw, Erik," he said. "You know that. But in the end I don't do a lot of harm. You know that, too. Chief Inspector Teal, who's on his way here now, knows it—but he has his duty to do. That's what he's paid for. And he has such a nasty suspicious mind, wherever I'm around, that he couldn't come in here and see—your brother—as things are—without finding a way to want me for murder. And that would all be very troublesome."

"But I can tell him——"

"That it wasn't my fault. I know. But that wouldn't cover what I did last night. I want you to say more than that."

The man did not speak, and Simon went on: "You look like Nordsten. You *are* Nordsten—with another first name. With a bit of good food and exercise, it'd be hard for anyone to tell the difference who didn't know Ivar very well; and from the look of things I shouldn't think he encouraged very many people to know him well. You were intended to take his place eventually—why not now?"

Erik Nordsten's breath came in a jerk.

"You mean——"

"I mean—*you are Nordsten!* You've suffered for him. You've paid for anything you may get out of it a thousand times over. And you're dead. You've been dead for two years. Now you've got another life open for you to step into. You can run his business honestly, or break it up and sell out—whichever you like. I'll

give you all the help I can. Nordsten got me here—thinking I was Vickery, who's a very clever forger—to forge national bonds for him. I suppose he was going to deposit them in banks to raise the capital to take over new business. Well, I won't forge for you—I couldn't do it, anyhow—but I'll lend you money and get my dividend out of this that way. What you do in return is to swear white, black, and coloured that you met me in Bond Street at two o'clock yesterday morning and brought me straight down here, and I've been with you ever since. That's the repayment you can make, *Ivar*—and you've got about thirty seconds to make up your mind whether you care to foot the bill!"

X

Still holding his seething wrath grimly in both hands, Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal tramped stolidly up the steps to the front door of Hawk Lodge and jabbed his thumb on the bell. It is not easy for any stranger to find a house on St. George's Hill, especially at night; for that aristocratic address consists of a large area of ground on which nameless roads are laid out with the haphazard abandon of a maze, connecting cunningly hidden residences which are far too exclusive to deface their gates with numbers. Sergeant Barrow had lost his way several times, and the delays had not helped Mr. Teal with his job of two-handed wrath-clutching. But during the ride he had managed it somehow; and it was very unfortunate that he had so little time to consolidate his self-control.

In a very few seconds the door was opened, and Teal pushed past the butler unceremoniously. It would not be true to say that Mr. Teal's heart was singing, but at least he had not yet plumbed the most abysmal caverns of despair.

"I want to see Mr. Vickery," he said; and the butler turned from the door.

"My name is Vickery, sir," he replied.

A spectral shade of ripe muscatel infused itself slowly into the detective's round ruddy face. His eyes protruded slowly, as if they were being gradually inflated by a very small air-pump. The wobblings of his round body were invisible beneath his clothes, but even without those symptoms there was something about his general aspect which suggested that a piece of tinder laid on his brow would have burst instantly into flame. When at last vocal expression could no longer be denied, his voice

cracked. He practically squeaked. *"What?"*

Mr. Teal had been looking at him more closely.

"Your name is Trusaneff," he said. "You did three years at Parkhurst for robbery with violence."

"Yes, sir," said the butler respectfully. "Nevertheless, sir, I have changed my name to Vickery."

Teal glowered past him at a man with a scarred face who was lounging at the other end of the hall.

"And I suppose *his* name is Vickery, too?" he said scorchingly.

The butler looked round, and nodded.

"Yes, sir. His name is also Vickery."

"How many more Vickerys are there in this house?" Teal howled, with his brain beginning to reel.

"Five, sir," said the butler imperturbably. "Everyone in this house is called Vickery, with the exception of Mr. Nordsten. Even the kitchen-maid," he added with a sigh, "is now known as Vickery. It is highly confusing."

Something that would have made a self-preservative rattlesnake wriggle away to hide itself down the nearest length of gas-pipe welled into the detective's bulging glare. There was a strange springy sensation in his legs, as if they had been separately hitched on to two powerful steam tractors and simultaneously extended in all directions. It was, as we have already admitted, very unfortunate. It gave Mr. Teal no chance. He ploughed on doggedly; but his hold on his temper was never again the firm commanding grip of a heavyweight wrestler subduing a recalcitrant urchin—it was more akin to the frantic clutch on the pants of a man whose suspenders have come apart.

"I'll see Mr. Nordsten," he announced gratingly; and the saturnine butler bowed.

"This way, sir."

He led the simmering detective to the library; and Mr. Teal followed him in and looked the room over with a pair of eyes in which the habitual affectation of sleepiness had to be induced with a bludgeon. Two men were sitting there, smoking cigars. One of them was a pale and tired-looking Ivar Nordsten—Teal, who made it his business to have at least a sight acquaintance with every important man in the country, had no difficulty in recognizing him—the other man called for no effort of recognition.

"Good evening, sir," Teal said curtly to Nordsten; and then he looked at the Saint. "You're also Vickery, I take it?"

The Saint smiled.

"Claud," he said penitently, "I'm afraid we've been pulling your leg."

Mr. Teal's tonsils came up into his mouth, and he gulped them back. The effort brought his complexion two or three shades closer to the tint of the sun-kissed damson.

"Pulling my leg," he repeated torridly. "Yes, I suppose you were."

"You see, Claud," Simon explained frankly, "when I heard you were on your way round here looking for a bloke named Vickery, I thought it would be rather priceless if you beetled in and found that the place was simply infested with Vickerys. I could just see your patient frog-like face——"

"Could you?" Teal's voice was thick and curdled with the frightful tension of his restraint. "Well, I'm not interested in that. What I want to hear from you is why you've been going under the name of Vickery yourself."

Nordsten cleared his throat.

"I suppose," he remarked coldly, "you consider that you have some right to come in and behave like this, Mr.—er——"

"Teal is my name, sir," said the detective tersely. "Chief Inspector Teal."

"Inspects anything," said the Saint. "Gas-meters, drains, hen-roosts——"

"I'm from Scotland Yard," Teal almost shouted.

"Where the Highlanders hang out their washing," Simon explained.

Mr. Teal's collar strained on its studs; and Nordsten nodded.

"That need not prevent you stating your business in a proper manner," he said stiffly. "What is all this fuss about?"

"That man," said the detective, with a sweltering glance at the Saint, "is a well-known criminal. His real name is Simon Templar; and I want to know what he's doing in this house pretending to be Vickery!"

"I can easily tell you that," answered Nordsten promptly. "Mr. Templar is an intimate friend of mine. I know his reputation, though I should hardly go so far as to call him a criminal. But he is certainly well known, and of course servants will always talk. I think he exaggerates the powers of gossip, but whenever he comes to stay with me he always insists on calling himself Vickery to save me from any embarrassment."

"And how long has he been staying with you this time, sir?" Teal inquired roughly.

"Since last night—or perhaps I should say yesterday morning."

"Can you remember the time exactly?"

"It must have been a few minutes after two o'clock. I met him in Bond Street, and he had just

left the Barnyard Club. I was driving home rather late from a dinner, and I asked Mr. Templar to come down with me."

It may be confessed at once that Chief Inspector Teal had never been kicked in the stomach by a sportive mule. But if that sublime experience had ever befallen him, it is safe to affirm that the expression on his face would have been practically indistinguishable from the one which came over it as he gaped speechlessly at Nordsten. Twice he attempted to force words through his larynx, which appeared to have become clogged with glue; and at the third attempt he succeeded.

"You tell me," he said, "that you met Templar in Bond Street at two o'clock yesterday morning, and brought him straight down here?"

"Of course," answered Nordsten shortly. "Why not?"

Mr. Teal took in a mouthful of air and wedged his bouncing tonsils down with it. Why not? When a taxi-driver had been found that very afternoon who said that a man whom he identified from Simon Templar's photograph had paid him five hundred pounds for his taxi, his overcoat, and his cap shortly after two o'clock? It was true that this man had said that he wanted the taxi for a museum——

"Did he have a taxi with him?" Teal blurted sudorifically.

"As a matter of fact, he had," said Nordsten with faint surprise. 'He had just bought it because he wanted to present it to a museum. We had to take it to a garage before we drove down."

"How on earth did you guess that, Claud?" asked the Saint admiringly.

Mr. Teal's pudgy fists clenched.

"Guess it?" he yapped, and cleared his obstructed throat. There were so many other things he wanted to say. How did he *guess* it? Words failed him. It was true that no one had been able to take the number of the taxi in which that particular train of trouble had begun, on account of its defective rear light; it was true that no one could positively identify the taxi, which was exactly the same as any other standard cab of pre-war vintage; it was true that no one could positively identify the man who had driven it; but there was a limit to coincidences. The Saint had met Mr. Teal outside the club, and seen him go in. The Saint had bought a taxi. Mr. Teal had ridden in a taxi shortly afterwards, and sustained adventures such as only the Saint's evil genius could have originated. How did he *guess* it? Mr. Teal's protruding eyes turn-

ed glassily back to the Saint; but what court in the kingdom would accept his description of Simon's smile of gentle mockery as evidence? Teal swung round on Nordsten again. "How long had he had this taxi when you met him?" he croaked.

"It can't have been many minutes," said Nordsten. "When I came down Bond Street he was standing beside it, and he pointed out the driver walking away and told me what had happened."

"Was anyone else with you?"

"My chauffeur."

"You know that your butler is a convicted criminal?"

Nordsten raised his eyebrows.

"I fail to see the connection; but of course I am familiar with his record. I happen to be interested in criminal reform—if that is any concern of yours." Erik was very tired; but the nervous tension of his voice and hands, at that moment, was very easily construed as a symptom of rising anger. "If I am to understand that you want my evidence in connection with some criminal charge, Inspector," he said with some asperity, "I shall be glad to give it in the proper place; and I think my reputation will be sufficient support of my sworn word."

Simon Templar eased a cylinder of ash off his cigar, and uncoiled his lazy length from the armchair in which he had been relaxing. He stood up, lean and wicked and tantalising in the silk dressing-gown which he had thrown on over his scanty clothing, and smiled at the detective very seraphically.

"Somehow, Claud," he murmured, "I feel that you're shinning up the wrong flag-pole. Now why not be a sportsman and admit that you've launched a floater? Drop in again some time and we'll put on the whole works. There will be a trap-door in the floor under the carpet, and a sinister cellar underneath with two dead bodies in it——"

"I wish one of them could be yours," said Mr. Teal, in a tone of passionate yearning.

"Talking of bodies," said the Saint, 'I believe your tummy is getting bigger. When I prod it with my finger——"

"Don't do it!" brayed the infuriated detective.

The Saint sighed.

"I'm afraid you're a bit peevish tonight, Eustace," he said reproachfully. 'Never mind. We all have our off moments, and a good dose of castor oil in the morning is a great pick-me-up. . . . And so to bed."

He steered the detective affectionately towards the door; and, having no other instructions, the inarticulate Sergeant Barrow joined in the general exodus. Mr. Teal could not for-

bid him. Looked at from every angle that Chief Inspector Teal's overheated brain could devise, which included a few slants that Euclid never dreamed of, the situation offered no other exit. And in the depths of his soul Teal wanted nothing better than to go away. He wanted to remove himself into some unfathomed backwater of space and sit there for centuries with a supply of spearmint in his pocket and an ice compress on his head, figuring out how it had all happened. And in his heart was some of the outraged bitterness which must have afflicted Sisera when the stars in their courses stepped aside to biff him on the dome.

"Mind the step," said the Saint genially at the front door.

"All right," said the detective grittily. "I'll look after myself. You'd better do the same. You can't get away with it for ever. One day I'm going to catch you short of an alibi. One day, I'm going to get you in a place that you can't lie yourself out of. One day——"

"I'll be seein' ya," drawled the Saint, and closed the door.

He turned round and looked at the butler, Trusaneff, who had come forward when the library door opened; and put his hands in his pockets.

"I gather that you remembered your lines, Trotzky," he said.

"Yes, sir," answered the man, with murderous eyes.

Simon smiled at him thoughtfully, and moved his right hand a little in his dressing-gown pocket.

"I hope you will go on remembering them," he said in a voice of great gentleness. 'The Vickery joke is over, but the rest goes on. You can leave this place as soon as you like, and take any other thugs you can find lying around along with you. But you are the only man in the world who knows that we've had a change of Ivar Nordstens, so that if it ever leaks out I shall know exactly who to look for. You know who I am; and I have a key to eternal silence."

He went back to the library, and Erik Nordsten looked up as he came in.

"Was I all right?" he asked.

"You were magnificent," said the Saint. He stretched himself, and grinned. "You must be just about all in by this time, my lad. Let's call it a day. A hot bath and a night's sleep in clean sheets will make a new man of you. And you will be a new man. But there's just one other thing I'm going to ask you to do tomorrow."

"What is it?"

"There's a rather pretty kid named Vickery round at my house who put me into the

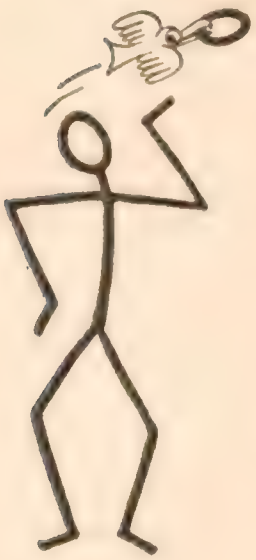
whole thing, if you haven't forgotten what I told you. I can smuggle her out of the country easily enough, but she's still got to live. One of your offices in Sweden might find room for her, if you said the word. I seem to remember you telling Claud Eustace that you were interested in reforming criminals, and she'd be an excellent subject."

The other nodded.

"I expect it could be arranged." He stood up, shrugging himself unconsciously in the unfamiliar feeling of the smart lounge suit which Simon had found for him in Nordsten's wardrobe; and what must have been the first smile of two incredible years flickered momentarily on his tired mouth. "I suppose there's no hope of reforming you?"

"Teal has promised to try," said the Saint piously.

NEXT MONTH —



THE BLACK MANDARIN
by *SAX ROHMER*

THE PEOPLE OF THE PEACOCK
by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

RIGHT THE WRONG
by *MIRIAM ALLEN DeFORD*

THE MAD YOGI OF ZARAPORE
by *LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN*

INSTEAD OF THE SAINT—VIII
by *LESLIE CHARTERIS*

THE DEVIL'S CASTLE

A New Story by HAL ELLSON

—in the December THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

experiment-

by Josephine Bell

THE yacht Euglena sighted St. Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight before dawn. An eight-ton ketch with a crew of four, she had left the little harbour of Omonville, near Cherbourg, the evening before and had idled across the Channel with a light, an all too light, breeze from the west.

The man on the helm picked up the loom of St. Catherine's light at three in the morning. By four the wind had freshened a little and the light was just beginning to flash above the horizon.

The next watch was now stirring below. One of them, Dr. David Wintringham, handed up cups of steaming cocoa, laced with rum, to the two yawning men in the cockpit and then clambered out, shivering a little as he met the cold breeze.

"We're moving a bit better," Jock said. 'Bill's been asleep since I took the helm." "Bloody

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We reviewed Josephine Bell's latest novel, CURTAIN FOR A CORPSE, last month, and here is another story about Dr. David Wintringham, whom we met in this novel. Miss Bell is the noted author of DEATH IN RETIREMENT, NEW PEOPLE AT THE HOLLIES, THE UPFOLD WITCH, etc.

First U.S. publication. Copyright © 1963 by Josephine Bell.
Originally published as, "Experiment — if you want to find the exact truth".
Reprinted by arrangement with the London Express Service.

liar!" the other man said.

The skipper came up from below. "Lot of nattering going on out here," he said.

He stared all round him, at the sea, at the horizon, at the flashing light that now began to rise above it.

"Steamer," George said, watching a set of lights behind them.

"Which one, George?" David asked. There were several small blocks of lights about.

George indicated the ship that seemed to be on their own course, both red and green lights showing.

The steamer did not pass them very closely, but close enough for them to identify her as a vessel of an eastern line bound from India through the Mediterranean to Southampton.

All four were on deck when at eight o'clock Bill sighted what he took to be a dirty white bundle of paper floating in the sea.

"Good God!" David said, a few seconds later. "It's a man!"

"A *what?*" the others shouted.

"A body, wearing a turban," David said, moving quickly to unlash the boathook.

They picked him up, a limp brown body, wearing the white turban that had attracted Bill's attention.

In the turban's folds David found a thin cotton vest, a purse with ten shillings in silver and a small package in a waterproof wrapping. Inside this there was a little box and in the box a white powdery substance.

"An Indian sailor," said George, "trying to smuggle dope ashore."

"Off that liner that passed us?" David suggested.

"Very likely. Nothing else passed us going in, within the last five hours, did it?"

"That's true. What was the idea?"

"Swim ashore to the island," Jock said. "Put on the vest, dry off the pants, mingle with the tourist hordes and take the ferry over from Ryde to Portsmouth later in the day. Or to Southampton from Cowes."

"But it didn't come off," George said, frowning. "Crazy coot, why did he try for it if he couldn't swim well enough?"

"Probably thought he could," David sighed. "Probably didn't understand how darned cold the water is round our coasts. But I think it was the tide defeated him. Say he went overboard between four and five, hereabouts, or probably farther out in the steamer channel.

"At five this morning the last hour of the ebb set out of Portsmouth and out of the forts, didn't it? Not the other way, down the Solent."

"Quite," George took it up. "But out here the east-going

stream was already starting up Channel. So the poor blighter would tend to be swept down towards the Owers on the ebb and then be picked up by the flood and carried on east. He wouldn't have a chance in hell of making the island, unless he was a particularly strong swimmer."

David did not answer. He had turned again to the box and now dipped a finger in the contents and put it to his tongue. He made a face, spat overboard and said in a voice of anger: "Now we know!"

"What do we know?"

"You taste it!"

He handed round the box. The other three shook their heads.

"What is it?" Jock demanded. "Hemp? Cocaine? Heroin?"

"What do we *know?*" George demanded.

"That this man was murdered."

"But he *drowned!*" three voices protested.

"He was intended to drown. Look!" David turned urgently to the skipper. "There's just a chance that liner's been held up at Cowes. It's low-water springs today, isn't it? We might be in time. Can we get through to anyone?"

"I doubt it, without radio," George said. "But we can put up a few flags."

They hoisted their yellow flag for the Customs, which they would have done in any case as soon as they passed the forts, and an SOS for good measure.

In the end it was a Customs patrol boat from Portsmouth that sighted their signals and raced up to them. They took the body on board; they took the turban and the box in its waterproof cover; they took David Wintringham, as the medical witness in the case.

David learned, as he expected, that the liner had reached Cowes before six, at dead low water and had anchored there for three hours.

The docks police were called in to control what happened next. When the patrol boat charged up Southampton Water in a flurry of spray the liner had already been sealed off, both passengers and crew prevented from leaving her.

The engineer officer recognised the corpse immediately. He knew two fellow Indians who had been the man's particular buddies. Before long these two appeared. The sight of their dead friend seemed to distress them deeply.

David asked for leave to speak to the men. Their knowledge of English, though limited, was sufficient. They had been with the line some time.

"Did this man know England well, too?" he began.

"No, sir. His first visit."

"He had never sailed here before? He had never been to Southampton?"

"No, sir."

"But you know it well."

"Very well, sir."

"Then you know why you waited at Cowes this morning? You understand the tides in the Solent?"

Fear flashed for a moment in the dark eyes.

"No understand, sir."

"I think you do. I think you meant this so-called friend of yours to drown."

It was late that afternoon when David hailed Euglena from the shore and was rowed off by Bill. The others were drinking in the cockpit. David told them what had happened.

"Drug smuggling, as we thought," he said. "The wretched chap's two friends wanted to snitch his share of the dope to add to their own. So they suggested this scheme to him. Told him it'd be safer for him, as he didn't know England, not to go through Customs. It was just as we thought. He was to swim ashore and pretend to be a tripper over on the island for the day. He might still have been stopped, I imagine. An Indian in a turban is not exactly an everyday sight at Ryde. Or maybe these days it is. I wouldn't know."

"So?"

"They had the stuff. The police wrinkled it out and the story with it. They broke down when I told them what was in the dead man's little box."

"I'm lost," Jock said. "They wanted his share, they hoped he'd drown. But he had his share with him, hadn't he?"

"No," said David.

"Then what was in the box?"

"Common salt. I tasted it."

"You bloody liar!" George roared. "Telling us—"

"I told you I knew he was murdered. I didn't tell you the stuff was salt."

"But—"

"I offered it round to all of you to taste. You refused. After all," he said, smiling, "experiment is the only way to discover truth, isn't it?"

death bid

by Wenzell Brown

Me and Maw's been 'tending auctions ever since we got hitched nigh on to thirty-three years ago. Course I pretend I'm goin' as sheriff but, up until last summer, I never seen nothin' more violent a-happenin' than a fine bout a hair-pullin' when Miss Susan Riggs bid in a piece of milk glass that some tourist lady from down Portland way had set her heart on.

Maw, she's got bit by the auction bug even worse'n me. Ain't no use denyin' she's picked up some mighty nice bargains but we got a passel o' junk up in the attic that ain't no use to no one.

Auctioneerin's always been a man's business roundabouts but three or four years back Kitty Murphy changed all that. Kitty's quite a woman, not exactly purty but what you'd call strikin' with her bright red hair, her deep colorin' and her full figger. She's a widder, her husband, Luke, gettin' kilt in a jeep accident while doin' his hitch in the army

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Wenzell Brown, author of more than thirty novels in this field, has written mostly about life in our cities — about the many groupings of peoples who are a part of this nation of peoples . . . He will be remembered by SMM readers for his superb WITNESS TO DEATH (SMM, July 1958), and for his more recent MARKED FOR DEATH (SMM, June, 1964). Here he turns to Maine — the older Maine — for another story about her people.

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and leavin' her with a couple o' young uns to rear.

Kitty inherits the Murphy farm about eight miles out o' Cripple's Bend. It's a big sprawlin' place and ain't in no shape for a woman to run. Kitty ain't got no money for hired help so, like it or lump it, seems like she has to sell out. Then she gets this brain storm about becomin an auctioneer.

Her daddy had been an auctioneer afore her, so Kitty knows the ropes right well. Even so people around don't take too kindly to a woman mountin' the block. With her first auction a-loomin' up, Kitty's growin' right fidgety.

Two, mebbe three days afore the big event, she drops into my office.

"Sheriff," she says, "I got a lot of money tied up in ads and posters and such and I hear there's likely to be a ruckus at the auction."

"How's that?" I ask, just to lead her on.

"Seems like the Rollins brothers don't want any competition. Not from a woman at least. They're priming up some teenagers to ruin my sale."

I know what she's talking about. I been hearin' rumors myself. Joe and Roy Rollins has been runnin' auctions around these parts for more years'n I like to count. Some say as they're just sharp Yankee traders while there's others as calls them crooks. Anyway for years I been gettin' complaints about them passin' off fake antiques but there ain't never been enough proof o' shady dealin's to get their license suspended.

"Kitty," I says, "If there's any rough stuff pulled over to your place, I'll be right on hand to break it up. But you're going to be up on the platform callin' the plays. I can't stop jeerin' and hecklin' and, if I try, you'll be the laughin' stock o' Cripple's Bend. You got to have the patter at your finger tips and win the crowd to your side. Can you do it, Kitty?"

Her jaw tightens up and her eyes flash. She says, "Sheriff, I heard my Daddy fend off every insult anyone could hurl at him. I reckon I can handle anything short of violence. That's your department."

The day the auction comes up, me and Maw's there bright and early. Even so there's a scatterin' o' men and boys hangin' about the big red Murphy barn. I spot the Rollins brothers first off and then a pair of hell-raisin' kids who live up near their place.

Kitty's got some prize pieces up on the block, a pair of rabbit-ear chairs and a walnut highboy. Then as a warmer-up she's piled some cut glass, a cherry-pattern

glass creamer and other small stuff onto an oak table, plannin' to sell it off in lots.

Me and Maw park the county car in the field behind the barn and we're a-comin' 'round the corner when we hear a crash. One of the fresh teen-age kids has tipped over a box o' pressed glass, a half a dozen pieces or so. There's only one in the lot as ain't in smithereens. While we stand there a-watchin', the kid lunges forward and his foot comes down hard on the one piece that's still whole.

Kitty's on the block above him. Her face is aflame with anger but I can see she's close to tears.

I look over to Joe Rollins. He returns my stare, poker-faced, but I know he's put the kid up to it. If I tackle Joe there'll be a loud argument just as folks is driftin' in for the auction. The same goes with the kid. There ain't no provin' he upset them glasses a-purpose. If I don't handle this right I'll have a hassle on my hands that'll drive a lot o' folks away and spoil the auction.

While I'm puzzlin' what to do, Maw marches straight up to the auction block. She comes in back o' the kid so fast, he don't even know she's there until she clouts him on both ears so hard he must a-felt he's been deafened for life.

The grin is wiped right off his face and he looks like he wants to bawl. Maw don't give him no time to recover. She digs out a dust-pan and brush from a lot o' household utensils and in no time flat the kid is down on his knees cleanin' up the mess he's made.

The Rollins brothers is lookin' right peeved but they don't say a mumblin' word. Maw's hands is on her hips and she's got a look on her face that don't brook no argument.

Sharp on the nose o' two, Kitty starts poundin' her gavel for the auction to begin. She ain't doin' too bad but she's stumblin' a little. Like me she's expectin' more trouble from the Rollins brothers and the longer they hold off the more jittery she gets.

Finally she comes around to some walnut finger-carved chairs. There's a pair of 'em, lady's and gent's, with long sweepin' lines, just right for settin' in front o' a fireplace.

While Kitty's in her spiel, there's a grumblin' and mumblin' from the back. Joe Rollins is shootin' off his mouth to his brother. Accordin' to him he's looked them chairs over earlier and they ain't real walnut and they're ruined by dry rot anyway.

The word spreads around fast. People reckon mebbe it's true

and mebbe it ain't but there's no percentage in takin' chances.

Kitty's got her gavel raised and she's beggin' for bids but there ain't no takers. Her voice is goin' shrill and it won't be more'n a few seconds afore she'll go to pieces. And then Maw's hand is raised, the fingers all spread.

"Five dollars I'm bid," Kitty quavers. "Who'll make it ten?"

"Seven," someone calls out from in back o' me. I crane my neck to see who's biddin'. It's Miles Clepperton, a dealer from Portland who covers most o' the auctions hereabouts. Clepperton's shrewd and he's honest. His bid guarantees the goods is on the up-and-up. He's hardly clipped the words out when someone raises the bid to ten.

Maw's right in there, uppin' the bid another two dollars. Her face is flushed and her eyes is bright. I can see all the symptoms of auction fever and I pat her on the arm tryin' to calm her down. Seems to me there ain't nothin' we need less than another pair o' chairs, even if they are beauties.

But Maw shakes loose o' me and I know there ain't no sense tryin' to hold 'er. At thirty-five dollars there's a pause and the gavel comes slammin' down.

"Sold to the lovely lady in the front row."

That's Maw. There's a dazed look on her face. Now she's knocked down them chairs, she's wonderin' if she's got stung. Her lips is pushin' in and out while she pays the runner and goes over to study her purchase.

Miles Clepperton comes up beside her. He says real sour-like, "The auctioneer was mighty fast closin' that bid. I was plannin' on raisin' another five."

He brings out forty dollars from his wallet. "Lady, how'd you like to turn a quick profit?"

But Maw's shakin' her head. She says, "You had your chance, Mr. Clepperton. Now these here chairs are mine and nobody's takin' 'em from me, not at twice the price."

Folks is gathered around listenin'. Enough of 'em know Maw and Miles Clepperton to be sure it ain't no put-up deal. A pent-up excitement is buildin' like it does sometimes at an auction. Kitty catches the scent of it and it puts color in her cheeks and a snap to her voice. After that there ain't nothin' she can't sell. The bids is comin' in so fast and heavy it's hard to keep track of 'em.

Well, that's the beginnin' of a lovely friendship between Maw and Kitty Murphy. Seems like every time Kitty's got a problem she comes around and chins it over with Maw. And that's how I first hear about Gil Dooley.

Gil's one of these artist fellers as flock around the countryside durin' the summer. The difference is he settles in for good. He's stayin' out to Mike Wessel's place down the road a stretch from the Murphy farm. He's rented an old shed from Mike and he's converted it into what he calls a studio. He's put in a pot-bellied stove and fixed the place up with stuff he's bought at auctions. So when winter comes he's snug as a bug.

Now Gil ain't no beatnik type even if he has grown a beard and sports a beret. He's the kind that keeps to himself. He hardly ever shows up in Cripple's Bend and don't talk to nobody when he does. That's what makes it sort o' surprisin' when he starts droppin' around on Kitty. Not that she ain't woman enough to set any man's pulse to racin'.

Gil's a good-lookin' feller and he's got a right pleasant way about him when he wants. Kitty ain't exactly cold to him but there's something about him that don't set right. He talks free and easy enough until she starts askin' questions like where he comes from and who his folks are. Then he shuts up like a clam.

Gil works himself around to askin' Kitty to marry him but she can't see gettin' spliced to a man she don't know nothin' about, 'specially when there's young 'uns to consider. Then Gil starts hintin' about some big deal he's got cookin' and the fat's really in the fire. Kitty's got it in her mind that whatever this deal is, it's crooked. She sends Gil a-scootin' but all the time she's a-hopin' he won't go far.

After Kitty has her talk with Maw, I drop over to Gil's place. He ain't too pleased to see me but he's hospitable enough. He asks me in for a beer. Me, I never did go for beer, cider bein' my drink, but it's as good an excuse as any to get a look-see at the studio.

Some of Gil's paintin's is layin' around. Now I ain't a-posin' as no expert on art but it seems to me like Gil ain't got much on the ball. Course I might say the same of some o' them big shot artists from New York, whose paintin's is all blobs o' mixed up color. But in this case Mike Wessel agrees with me. Mike moves around with the arty crowd in summer and claims to know the score. His opinion is that Gil's stuff ain't worth it's weight in sour apples.

I know what's botherin' Kitty. There's a queer sort o' smell to Gil Dooley, but I can't put my finger on what's wrong. And before I get around to make inquiries, Gil's dead.

Comes along one cold fall evening and I get an excited telephone call from Mike. Seems

like Gil ain't showed up around the place since mornin' and he's missed his meals that he takes with the Wessels. He ain't never pulled a disappearin' act before and Mike is worried. He remembers seein' a half-finished paintin' of Hickey's pond on Gil's easel the day before so he decides to go down there to look for him.

Mike don't get far. To the north o' his land is a stand o' scrub pine and spruce. In the clearin' beyond, he spies somethin' red huddlin' among the dried huckleberry bushes. Sure enough it's Gil, in his checkered lumber jacket, lyin' face down on the ground. The back of his head is like to be torn off by the blast of a bullet. There ain't no doubt about it. Gil's deader'n a mackerel.

The huntin' season's only a few days away and it looks like some hunter's jumped the gun and shot Gil by mistake. Probably some city feller. When Mike shows me the body he's cussin' and fumin about these tin-horn hunters who are fillin' the woods and killin' each other off faster'n they can shoot game.

I let Mike stew but I'm noticin' a couple o' funny things. That ain't no rifle wound in Gil's head. Looks to me more like it comes from a revolver. And why is Gil's easel in the underbrush thirty feet away? This ain't no huntin' accident but cold-blooded murder. I'm sort of suspicious of Mike when he don't tumble to it straight off.

I don't say nothin' but I start checkin' back on Gil Dooley. I come smack up against a stone wall. No mail. No identity papers. I can't find out a blessed thing about him savin' I've a hunch his real name ain't Dooley. As for suspicious strangers, with the huntin' season comin' up, the countryside is crawlin' with 'em.

I keep nosin' around Gil's place though I don't rightly know what I'm lookin' for. The third mornin' I'm out there Mike comes over, his jaw set in a grim line.

He says, "There was trouble out here last night, Sheriff."

I wait for him to tell me about it.

He says, "A little past midnight someone busted into Gil's studio. I heard 'em messin' around and seen a movin' light like the beam of a flashlight. I yelled from the winder. The light jumps off and everything's quiet. I yell again but still there ain't no answer. So I grab my shotgun and blasts away, aimin' for the nearest star. Whoever this feller is he don't like it. He tears out o' there like the devil's shook pepper on his tail. He

must a-had a car parked up the road a spell 'cause in about two minutes I hear the engine a-sputterin'. Then the car comes racin' along the road lickety-split, without no headlights on, headin' back toward Cripple's Bend."

Mike goes into the studio with me. There ain't no doubt it's been searched. Drawers is pulled out, the mattress dragged onto the floor and Gil's stuff scattered all around. But as far as we can see nothin' is missin'.

Mike scratches his head. "Don't make no sense. Lump all o' Gil's stuff together and it ain't worth the price o' cartin' it off."

"What about the pictures?" I ask, noticin' some of 'em has been pulled off the walls.

Mike grins at that. He says, "I reckon I better store 'em up in the attic in case any o' Gil's kin shows up and wants 'em for mementos but believe me, Sheriff, Gil warn't no Picasso. You might call him a gifted amateur but even then you'd be stretchin' the truth a bit."

I can't argue the point. All the same I hang around while Mike and his wife, Florrie, clean up the studio. It keeps runnin' through my mind about the big deal Gil had been hintin' about to Kitty Murphy. I got a feelin' the deal went sour and that's the cause of his death.

When everything's shipshape I stroll over to the Murphy farm and pump Kitty about everything Gil's ever told her. I'd a-done better to stay at home. I don't learn a thing I haven't already heard second-hand from Maw.

That's the way things stand 'til late next summer. Then Mike Wessel dies of a heart attack and Florrie decides to go out to California to live with a sister o' hers. The Wessel place is up for sale but instead of sellin' lock, stock and barrel, Florrie decides she can pick up some quick cash by lettin' Kitty auction off the furniture. There's a lot of antique stuff in the house and Kitty's right pleased with the chance o' puttin' it on the block.

Florrie don't want the heartbreak of seein' her household goods bein' sold, so she has 'em all carted over to Kitty's auction barn. I'm visitin' Kitty when the load arrives and I help her unpack. All Gil Dooley's pictures is there. Accordin' to rights, I reckon they don't belong to the Wessels but there ain't nobody else put in a claim for 'em. Anyway Mike has paid for Gil's buryin' so it seems to me like Florrie's deservin' o' whatever the pictures can fetch.

Kitty's examinin' the pictures, her mouth all puckered and her eyes puzzled. She looks up and

sees me watchin' her. She gives a little laugh and says, "Maybe I'm crazy, Sheriff, but I've got a feeling there's more to these pictures than appears on the surface."

I shrug. "I wouldn't know but Mike swore they was junk."

"Mike was no expert," Kitty snaps.

I don't see Kitty again 'til the day o' the auction but I seen her ads in the papers. She lists all the most valuable pieces of furniture she'll be sellin' and besides that she announces the sale of twenty-two oil paintings by Gil Dooley.

Maw tells me she's run the same ad in the Portland papers and sent circulars to dealers as far away as Boston.

The afternoon of the auction is crisp and clear, just right to bring out a big crowd. Me and Maw arrives early but even so the parkin' lot is more'n half filled. I look around. Lots o' the folks is regulars, people who ain't missed an auction hereabouts for donkeys' years. There's a-scatterin' o' dealers and three or four people who is strangers. I spot Miles Clepperton. He gives me a nod and ambles over.

"What's up, Sheriff? Has Kitty got something special up her sleeve?"

"What makes you think so, Miles?"

"See the man in the Homburg over there. D'you know who he is?"

"Never laid eyes on him before."

"Gustave Daimler. He's got a gallery in Boston. He doesn't mess around unless it's something big."

I look Daimler over. He's got a soft chubby body, with short arms and legs but a heavy chest and a head that makes me think of a lion. He sees me oglin' him and returns my stare. His eyes is almost tawny beneath thick-lensed glasses and, despite the dewlaps, there's a lot o' strength to his face.

I look on past him to where two men are standin'. They're strangers and they don't fit into a country auction. The younger feller is tall and dark and good-lookin' in a sharpie sort o' way. He's wearin' an off-white topcoat over a tailored suit of Italian silk, and a narrow-brimmed city hat. The feller with him is the muscles type, with bulgin' biceps, broad face and a butch haircut.

Miles Clepperton is followin' the direction of my gaze. "D'you know 'em?" he whispers.

"Nope. They're new in these parts. Can't say as how I like their looks neither."

We're interrupted by Kitty comin' out o' the house. She stops to give Maw a kiss; then

she's up on the platform a-poundin' her gavel for silence.

She enters into her welcomin' spiel and then puts up an old spinnin' wheel. The auction moves along at a right brisk clip but, to tell the truth, I ain't payin' much attention. I hear Maw biddin' on some milk glass but I don't even notice whether she gets it or not. All the time I'm a-watchin' the strangers.

Daimler just stands there a-lookin' up at the auction block and not makin' a move. The two other fellers act bored and restless. The dark one pulls out a miniature gold knife from his pocket and starts diggin' at his nails with the shiny blade. His friend slumps down on a packin' case, his mouth sulky and mean.

None of 'em come to life 'til Kitty's runners start luggin' Gil's paintin's out o' the barn and settlin' em up on the platform. The pictures vary in size but most are about right for hangin' in an ordinary room, twenty inches by fifteen or thereabouts. A few are landscapes but most of 'em are done in oil with bright bursts of color. They don't say nothin' to me but I got to admit that there's a sense o' crude movement and power to 'em.

People gather around to give 'em the once over. There's an arty couple near me. The woman passes some snide remark and they both snicker.

But Gustave Daimler ain't laughin'. He's movin' quietly from paintin' to paintin', studyin' each one, first from one angle, then another. About the same time I notice a fourth stranger. He's dark and slim, the kind that melts into a crowd unobtrusive-like. But right now he's watchin' Daimler like a cat.

Kitty's doin' a build-up on Gil Dooley, claimin' he was a local artist without fame in his own country. I don't know whether she's serious or not and I don't think she quite knows herself.

She starts off with the smallest paintin' of 'em all. It looks to me like a sunset gone crazy. Daimler puts in a bid for a dollar. I look at the feller in the Italian suit. His eyes have gone hard and he stares at Daimler like he don't like what he sees.

But the next bid comes from Miles Clepperton, raisin' the ante to two dollars. Daimler goes to three. Clepperton makes it five and Daimler drops it on him. Miles makes a grimace. I can tell he's surprised. He'd expected Daimler to bid high or not at all.

Daimler bids in most o' Gil's pictures for a dollar or two. The whole business strikes me as bein' on the queer side. Kitty's got a puzzled frown on. Now and then Clepperton or Roy Rollins tries to run Daimler up. When the price reaches five dol-

lars, Daimler drops it like a hot cake.

The action is slow and by rights the crowd should be gettin' restless but instead there's a tension buildin' up. The word spreads about who Daimler is and everyone's a-watchin'. He don't seem to notice but just keeps on biddin', signallin' with his fingers and sayin' nary a word.

Finally there's only two pictures left. They're big, sprawlin' canvases that Kitty's left to the end. She's gettin' edgy and I reckon she wants to bring the auction to a close. Anyway she decides to sell them as a pair. I can't see they're much different from the smaller ones. Fragmented designs of orange and yeller against a background of inky blue.

Daimler hardly lets Kitty get through her patter afore his hand is spread, all the fingers a-showin'.

Afore Kitty can note the bid, this feller in the silk suit speaks out. His voice is harsh as gravel.

"Twenty-five dollars." he says.

There's a gasp from the crowd. Daimler swivels that leonine head o' his around to take a good squint at silk suit. Then he raises his fingers again.

"Thirty dollars I'm bid," Kitty intones. "Thirty dollars for these fine oil paintings."

"Thirty-five." It's Miles Clepperton speaking.

"Fifty." Silk suit raps the words out.

That's the way it goes. Sometimes the bids come so fast they're tumblin' over each other. At other times the hesitation is so long Kitty's all ready to bring her gavel down.

Daimler is raisin' steady, five dollars each time. Silk suit is jumpin' by as much as fifty dollars. Clepperton is stickin' in his oar every so often, his voice high and uncertain.

The rest o' the crowd is gulpin' and lookin' from one bidder to another, wonderin' what in tarnation it's all about. They're sort o' scared too; theres something dangerous about this feller in the silk suit.

The biddin' goes up to a thousand dollars. Silk suit screams the bid out. Daimler hunches his shoulder and makes a futile gesture with his hands to show he won't bid no higher.

The gavel comes smackin' down.

"Sold to the young man in the silk suit for one thousand dollars."

A sigh runs through the crowd. The auction's over and it's gettin' dark with the threat o' a sudden squall. Folks start driftin' away fast but me and Maw stay where we are. I got a hunch the scene ain't been played out and in that I'm right.

T'ain't long afore there's a hubbub over at the cashier's desk. I hear silk suit snarlin' and Jennie Jones, who's been actin' as cashier for Kitty, is blubberin' and protestin'.

Then Kitty's voice raises above the rest. She's pointin' to a sign and readin' it out loud. "All sales cash and final."

"Look, sister, I'm Enrico Bondi ," silk suit is sayin', "And I got credit cards to prove it. Do I look like a cheap schmuck who'd pass a rubber check for a grand?"

"I don't care if your name is Rockefeller," Kitty snaps. "I don't accept checks from anyone."

"Are you insinuating I'm a crook?"

"Im not insinuating anything. I'm telling you straight out. It's cash on the line or no sale."

Daimler steps in between them. "I tell you what, Mrs. Murphy. I'll make good on the thousand dollars." His wallet is open and a green sheaf of bills is showin'.

"None of that," Bondi yells. "I bid them pictures in fair and square. Nobody's takin' 'em away from me."

Daimler fingers the bills, smiling. "How about it, Mrs. Murphy?"

Kitty hesitates. "I don't know," she says. "I trust you, Mr. Daimler, while this man's a stranger."

"Why you rotten two-timing broad," Bondi shouts. "I ought to smash your teeth in."

I'm movin' toward em but I aint fast enough. Kitty grates, "I'm not takin' that from anyone. Now you get off my land and stay off."

Bondi steps back. He moves so quick I don't see him go for the gun but there it is in his hand, an ugly, snub-nosed, blue-gray automatic.

He raps out, "Eddie, grab those pictures. Stow 'em in the car. I'll see these rubes don't make no trouble."

His crew-cut friend darts forward. He scoops up the two oil paintings, each of them almost as tall as himself. Then he's backin' away toward the red Jaguar that's parked at the corner of the barn. He's movin' a little clumsy with the awkwardness of what he's carryin'. But there ain't nothin' clumsy about Bondi. He's got me, Daimler, Clepperton and the whole knot of people around us covered.

I think of goin' for my gun but I know it's a crazy idea. Any shootin' is too danged dangerous with women folk around and kids still scootin' for their cars.

Then I hear a curse and a crash from the direction of the Jaguar. This feller called Eddie is a-sprawlin' on the ground with the canvases all over him. I seen what happened out o' the

corner o' my eyes. Eddie come too close to Maw and she looped the curved head of her 'brelli around his left ankle and now she's lambastin' him over the head like billy-be-damned while he's a-screamin' and tryin' to cover up with his arms.

Bondi's head swerves toward Eddie and his mouth goes slack. I'm a-leapin' toward him but somebody beats me to it. He's the dark unobtrusive young feller I'd noticed watchin' Daimler earlier. This feller tackles Bondi around the waist, draggin' him down. Then quicker'n lightnin' he's got a hammerlock on him. There's a glint o' metal and a clickin' sound and Bondi's wrists is handcuffed in back o' him.

I can see the situation is well in hand even if I don't understand none of it. Anyway right then I got my work cut out for me. I got to save Eddie from Maw afore he gets too bunged up to be of any use.

Well, I don't mind tellin' you it takes quite a spell to get things sorted out. Seems like this feller who grabbed Bondi is a detective from New York by the name o' John Peco and he makes a specialty of recovering what he calls objets d'art. Bondi and his friend, Eddie Clevell, is professional thieves. That much comes out afore I take the whole kit and kaboodle of 'em to the barracks over at Barrow.

Daimler, Kitty and Miles Clepperton tag on behind. I have to admit I'm still a bit fussed.

I says to Peco, "What art objects did these fellers steal? Are you tellin's me them pictures of Gil Dooley's is really valuable?"

Peco chuckles. He asks, "Did you ever hear of Titian, Sheriff?"

That makes me bristle. I may be a backwoodsman but I know Titian's a famous artist. Though I have to admit mebbe I wouldn't a-known so much if there hadn't been such a to-do about him in the papers a year or two back.

I'm tryin' to remember what I read. It comes back sort o' slow. Seems like the Henderson Museum of Fine Arts was plannin' a special exhibition in New York and the central attraction was to be these two portraits o' Titian that's bein' loaned to 'em by the Italian government. Then, on the eve of the openin', the Museum's busted into and the Titians is stolen.

I remember seein' photographs of the pictures and readin' as how they were insured for a quarter of a million dollars. The insurance company posts a reward promisin' ten per cent o' that sum for information leadin'

to the recovery of the paintings. But I still don't get the connection. Them Italian pictures sure don't look nothin' like them dabs o' Gil Dooley's.

Peco spells it out for me. The New York Police have got a pretty good idea of the gang who pulled the job. Five men is involved—Bondi, Eddie Clevell, a feller called Terry Smith, an art dealer named Asche and Gil Dooley whose real name turns out to be Duncan Gilhooley.

The caper goes off sweet and smooth. The gang runs into trouble later on. Pictures ain't something you can split up and pass around. Needs a lot o' inside knowledge to find a market for 'em.

Dooley, I reckon I better still call him that, wants to make a dicker with the insurance company but Asche ain't havin' none o' that. He wants to sell to a private collector. And because Asche is willin' to put up some quick money, the others play along with him.

Asche don't want the pictures in his gallery because he thinks the police may search there. Instead he hands them over to Dooley for safekeeping. He even explains how to make a mat of 'em over which he can place his own paintin's and tells him that if he covers them with oils the Titians can be cleaned later and no harm done.

But once Dooley's got his hands on the Titians, he pulls a bunk. He loads 'em in the back o' his car and takes off. I reckon he drives more or less at random until he finds a place so far out o' the way that he thinks no one will be able to trace him. And, by chance, that place is Cripple's Bend.

You'd reckon a smart boy like Gil would do a better job at disguising' his name but I guess he feels nobody's comin' around Mike Wessel's place to sniff him out.

That's where he's mistaken. Somehow Terry Smith catches wind o' where he's hidin'. Terry's a trigger-happy punk, the kind that shoots first and does his thinkin' afterward. He's layin' in wait for Gil in the woods back o' Wessel's place one mornin'. Gil soft-talks him, promisin' to lead him to the Titians. Then when Terry's guard is down, Gil slugs him and makes a dash for it. But Terry catches up with him and puts a bullet through the back o' his head.

Terry panics. All he can think of is how much distance he can put between himself and Gil's body. But a few days later he pulls himself together and works up enough nerve to come back and search Gil's studio. Mike Wessel surprises him at it and takes a pot shot at him. Terry high-tails out o' there

again, headin' for Boston.

This time he reckons he better have help. He phones both Asche and Bondi and spills most o' the story. But he's cagey enough to conceal the spot where Gil's been stayin'.

Terry agrees to meet the gang in New York. But afore he hits the highway he does a bit o' bar-crawlin' and takes on a fine load o' Irish whiskey. Seems like whiskey, a wet road and heavy traffic ain't a healthy combination. He never makes it to New York. Instead he piles up on the side of the road and they have to pry him out o' his Chevvy. He's as dead as Gil Dooley.

The secret o' the location o' Gil's studio dies with Terry. But neither Asche nor Bondi stop huntin', each hopin' to get there first and double-cross the other. They're puttin' out feelers all the time but gettin' nowhere fast. Gil Dooley's death has been passed off as an accident and ain't reported in any o' the papers. They ain't got a clue to go on.

But Terry's told 'em about how he's searched the place and about the two big pictures on Gil's walls. The paintin's don't mean a thing to a hood like Terry but right off Bondi and Asche think they know how them Titians is hid.

They're rangin' the countryside askin' guarded questions about some painter feller who's got himself kilt recently. But there's a lot o' territory to cover and neither of 'em's ever heard o' Cripple's Bend.

Then out of the blue, Kitty Murphy runs her ad in the Portland papers — twenty-two oil paintings of Gil Dooley to be sold at auction. The name rings a bell for both Asche and Bondi. Asche is a business man and he plays it careful. He hires Gustave Daimler to act as his agent to bid in all paintings by Gil Dooley and of a certain size. Daimler insists on a maximum price and Asche puts on a cover of a thousand dollars, never dreamin anyone else'll bid that for an original Gil Dooley. Daimler's got a shrewd idea he's bein' used as a cat's paw but he don't know what the game is. Out of curiosity and so it won't look so strange when he bids in the larger canvases, he buys in all the other pictures he can get cheap.

Enrico Bondi takes more direct action. As for Miles Clepperton, he puts in his bid now and then because he knows Daimler's not wastin' any money and reckons he might be able to cut himself in on something good.

Peco's been watchin' the whole shebang for a long time. He's been trailin' Bondi and Clevell while his parner's kept

an eye on Asche. As soon as Bondi leads him to Kitty's auction barn, Peco works out where the Titians must be hid. Even if Bondi hadn't tussled with Kitty over the payment, Peco would never have let Bondi or Daimler drive off with them canvases.

But here's the joker. No matter how Peco tries he can't find them Titians. There ain't no false backs to Gil's pictures and the canvas is brand spankin' new. Everybody's been so danged smart reckonin' out where Gil hid them pictures and they just plain ain't there.

Peco's about wild. He goes over Mike Wessel's farm with a fine-tooth comb and questions Florrie and Kitty and everyone else who's known Gil. And when he's all finished he don't come up with a single clue to the missin' portraits.

I'm over to Kitty's barn one day when Peco's there a-poundin' away at Kitty, askin' her if she's sure there ain't no more o' Gil's paintins layin' around the place. She's denyin' it and then suddenly the back of her hand flies to her mouth. She says, "There was one other picture. Gil gave it to me a month or so before he died. I just stuck it away in a closet and scarcely looked at it."

Peco's face lights up like a birthday candle. Kitty runs upstairs and rummages around in a closet, with Peco right on her heels. But when she drags out the paintin' his face drops. It's one o' the smallest o' Gil's landscapes and one thing is for sure, there ain't no portrait underneath it.

He turns away in disgust and I'm left alone with Kitty. She's sort o' frownin' and shakin' her head.

She says, "There's something off-beat about this picture. When Gil gave it to me, he said, 'Take good care of it, Kitty. Some day, it'll be worth a fortune, more than all the rest of my work combined.' I didn't think much about it at the time. Gil had a few beers under his belt and besides he was always talking big."

She turns the picture over and I take a good look at it. 'Tain't like anything else o' Gil's. No bright colors. Just a woodland scene, meticulously done. I recognize the spot right off the bat. It's a point o' land stickin' out into the old ice pond. There's a pair o' tall pine trees, a tangle of blackberry briers and a tiny clearin' in the center.

"Look," Kitty says, and her finger goes down to the roots o' one o' the trees.

A couple o' seconds pass afore I catch her meanin'. At first glance there's nothin' but gnarled roots but, when you look closer, them roots become a hand with a finger pointin'

straight down to the base o' the pine.

I don't say a word. I rush downstairs, grab a shovel that's layin' by the shed and light out for Hickey's Pond with Kitty right on my tail.

I don't have to dig far or deep. Mebbe three feet down and the shovel strikes somethin' that makes a crinklin' noise. I clear out some more earth and there's a big roll o' oilcloth. I unroll the wrappin's real careful and there the Titians are starin' up at me, the prettiest sight you ever did see.

Kitty gasps. She can't take her eyes off 'em. "They're beautiful," she says.

"And there's a reward of twenty-five thousand for their recovery," I remind her. "I reckon that belongs to you."

She answers real quick, "We'll share it."

"Nope. I'm a law man. I can't take no reward for performin' my duties. You take them pictures to Peco. I reckon that's what Gil intended you should do."

Well, it works out like I said. Kitty collects the reward money but that ain't all. She picks up a husband too. This feller Peco took a likin' to Cripple's Bend, or mebbe it was Kitty Murphy who persuaded him to linger on.

Anyway he and Kitty's married now. Ain't no use denyin' I was worried when I heard he was settlin' down on the Murphy farm. After more'n thirty years as sheriff, I didn't cotton to the idea o' mebbe bein' pushed out by a city-trained cop.

But I needn't a-worried. Seems like Peco's always had a thing about auctions. And with all the publicity over them Titians, Kitty couldn't a-handled all the business that comes her way if she didn't have Peco to help her. As far as I can reckon out they're about the happiest couple in the whole of Pisquaticook County.

I got to say this for Kitty, she don't forget her friends, especially Maw. Most every time I come home I stumble over some gift Kitty's sent to her. We got enough gate-leg tables, rabbit-ear chairs and such to hold an auction of our own.

Maw's even been talkin' about takin' out a license but for once I put my foot down.

"Maw," I tells her, "No wife o' mine's goin' to mount an auction block and start yodelin' goin'-goin'-gone!"

Maw looks right wistful but she says, "No, I guess it wouldn't be fair to Kitty."

That's as good a reason as any and right there I let the matter drop.

the symbol in the boot

by E. P. Oppenheim

MR. BILLINGHAM, attracted always by the unusual, paused in his early morning stroll through the clean streets, the flower-bedecked squares and along the glorious Terrace of Monte Carlo, to regard with some surprise the extraordinary spectacle of a man seated before one of the tables outside the Café de Paris fast asleep. The place was almost deserted, save for the sprinkling of visitors who came to take their early morning *déjeuners* in the sunshine, and Ben Hassim, the swarthy vendor of carpets, who stood patient in the background, taking apparently no interest whatever in his immediate surroundings, yet with a curious air of watchfulness in his attitude and shining out of his black eyes. The young man who had attracted Mr. Billingham's attention was seated at one of the tables a little removed from the others and was sleeping peacefully and apparently naturally. It was obvious to an

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E. Phillips Oppenheim seems so much the rapporteur of vanished mores and of ways incredibly alien to us in these days, that it is hard for some to realize that this tremendously successful novelist, aptly called "the chronicler of his era", was after all writing about men and women who've lived or still live in our times. Nothing underscores so vividly the changes in our standards — in our morals — in our myths H.S.S.

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habitué of the place, however, that so unusual a proceeding would before long evoke interference from the authorities. A waiter had already called the attention of a *maître d'hôtel* to his presence; a gendarme from the Square had halted in his promenade and seemed to be contemplating action. Mr. Billingham approached, leaned over the sleeping man, sniffed the air for a moment and became immediately interested. He summoned the *maître d'hôtel.*

"How long has he been here?" he enquired, indicating the recumbent figure.

"Since the place was opened, monsieur," the man replied. "It seems probable that he spent a great portion of the night here. It is time he moved on."

Mr. Billingham produced a twenty-franc note.

"Will you let him remain for ten minutes longer?" he begged. "I shall return by then. I am going to the chemist's. The young man is suffering from the effects of some drug."

The twenty-franc note resulted in the usual miracle, and on Mr. Billingham's return, in less than the time he had stated, he found the object of his solicitude still asleep. He poured a little powder into a wineglassful of soda-water and took the young man firmly by the arm.

"You must wake up," he said.

At the second injunction the sleeper opened his eyes and stared around him in a dazed fashion. Mr. Billingham thrust the wineglass into his fingers.

"Drink this," he ordered.

The young man obeyed. Then he blinked several times, stared around him again, and finally loked hard at Mr. Billingham.

"How did I get here, and who are you?" he demanded.

"How you got here is the question we've all been asking," Mr. Billingham replied. "As for me, I'm just an American visitor, staying at the hotel yonder. My name is Billingham."

The young man shook himself. He was a sunburnt, good-looking fellow and had a soldierly air notwithstanding his crumpled clothes, somewhat dishevelled appearance, and the fact, disclosed by the shape of his boots, that one leg was a little longer than the other.

"Well," he declared, "they got me first time. Drugged and robbed, I suppose."

He opened his coat and drew out a pocketbook. A considerable number of mille notes were there, some visiting-cards, and an odd letter or two.

"They've left you some money, at any rate," Mr. Billingham observed.

The young man returned the case to his pocket.

"Yes," he assented. "They

haven't touched that. They've taken the packet, though."

He pressed his disabled foot on to the ground for a moment, and leaned once more back in his chair.

"Anything valuable?" Mr. Billingham asked. "Do you want to get in touch with the police? I'm rather close to the chief here."

The other shook his head.

"The packet," he confided, dropping his voice a little, "is not quite so valuable as the people who stole it imagine. All the same I think I had better be getting along. They'll be after me again as soon as they find out."

He rose to his feet a little unsteadily. There was still rather a drawn look about his face.

"Say, where are you staying?" Mr. Billingham enquired.

"Close here—at the Robespierre."

"I'll walk down with you if you like," his rescuer suggested. "I'm just out to stroll about."

"It would be very kind of you," was the grateful acknowledgment. "To tell you the truth I'm still feeling a little giddy."

He picked up his rubber-tipped stick and leaned for a moment heavily upon it. Ben Hassim, the vendor of carpets, who had advanced slowly nearer and nearer, salaamed as he accosted them. His white teeth flashed and his smile was as irresistible as ever. Nevertheless, there was a gleam of anxiety in his dark eyes.

"Has the young gentleman been robbed of anything valuable?" he asked anxiously.

"Why should you think that he had?" Mr. Billingham rejoined.

Hassim patiently deposited one of the rugs, which was slipping from his shoulder, upon the back of a chair.

"Because it was I who brought him down here," he confided. "I found him up in Beausoleil. He was on a chair in front of a restaurant—not a good restaurant. I knew that if he stayed there it would be ill for him. I brought him here. I was waiting until he awoke."

The young man's hand went towards his pocket, but Hassim's arresting gesture was full of dignity.

"I desire nothing," he said. "Only I wish to be assured that the gentleman has not been robbed."

The latter thrust the twenty-franc note back into his pocket.

"Curiously enough, I have not," he replied. "Something was taken from my pocket, but it was of no value to anybody. Anything I had with me," he added, looking intently at Hassim, "which is of value, I still possess."

Once more Hassim salaamed. He gathered up his rugs and retreated. They both looked after him curiously.

"That's a quaint fellow," the young man remarked.

"Got something at the back of his mind about you," Mr. Billingham mused, as they walked slowly off together. . . .

"My name is Powell—Leonard Powell," the young man volunteered, after a momen's silence. "I suppose you think that I've been making a night of it?"

"Kinder looks like it," his companion assented.

"Well, I haven't. I'm here on a special errand. I knew I was being watched and I went up to dine at the quietest place I know of—right at the back of the town here. I had half a bottle of wine and a liqueur brandy. The last thing I remember was paying my bill."

"Any ladies about?"

"Not a sign of one," was the emphatic reply.

"Sounds kind of interesting," Mr. Billingham observed, as they neared the hotel. "Sure you don't want me to get you in right with the police?"

The young man shook his head.

"The police couldn't help me," he confided. "If you like to come in and have your morning coffee with me, I'll tell you just the little more there is to be told."

Mr. Billingham accepted with alacrity. They made their way into the almost deserted *salon* of the hotel and the young man, after a few minutes' absence for a wash and a change of linen, seated himself at the table opposite his guest. His clothes were well-cut, but a trifle shabby. He was, however, entirely presentable and Mr. Billingham found his original impressions confirmed.

"Read that first," Power enjoined, producing a long newspaper cutting from *The Times*. I found it in the personal column a fortnight ago."

Mr. Billingham adjusted his glasses and read:—

> *"WANTED. Ex-officer or young man of courage, willing to risk his life in a dangerous enterprise. Adequate remuneration. No hardship, but real danger. Applicant must produce unexceptionable references and be unmarried.—Apply Box B. 771. The Times, E.C.4."*

"I saw this," Mr. Billingham declared, tapping the cutting with his forefinger. "I remember wondering at the time whether it was genuine."

"I should think it is probably genuine enough, judging from last night," the young man ob-

served. "Anyhow, I answered the advertisement. I happen to have a few decent medals and a pretty good record, and I got the job. I was passed through three hands before I came to the principal. I can't tell you his name, but he is the head of the greatest financial and exploration company in the world. The job when I got it seemed almost ludicruously simple. I was to bring a packet here and deliver it safely to the person for whom it was intended."

"Sounds pie to me," Mr. Billingham commented. "Why don't you deliver it and get it off your chest?"

"It isn't quite so simple as that. Even the person who entrusted me with the commission didn't know exactly who would come for the packet. They could only tell me how to recognise him when he did arrive. Meanwhile, as they warned me, there's an ugly crowd around, who would like apparently to nobble me and get hold of it, whatever it may be."

Mr. Billingham for the first time felt inclined to doubt his companion's *bona fides*. His story on the face of it was scarcely convincing.

"Do you know what this mysterious packet of your contains?" he enquired.

"Not an idea," the young man confessed.

"Do you know what sort of person you have to look out for?"

"He isn't an ordinary personage," was the somewhat hesitating reply. "I shall probably know when he is here."

Mr. Billingham coughed. The greatest in the world are not infallible. For once in his life he had arrived at a wrong decision.

"Well," he remarked, as he pushed back his chair and rose, "I wish you luck. I must be getting along."

The young man walked with him to the door. The air was filled with soft sunlight and the faintest of southern breezes stirred the leaves of the trees in the gardens on their left. The hour was still early and there were few people about. A dark-skinned denizen of some southern race was reading a newspaper in the little railed-off space in front of the hotel. Powell glanced towards him with a frown.

"Another of the brutes!" he muttered. "On guard, I suppose. . . . Well, good morning, sir. Thank you very much for your help."

Mr. Billingham, whose interest in the affair had experienced a slight revival, had a question to ask, but his companion had already left him. Just before he reached the opposite side of the way, he turned around, conscious of an unusual noise. An

elderly gentleman of military appearance was knocking the stone balustrade behind which the solitary occupant of the hotel piazza was seated—knocking it with the obvious intention of attracting the dark-skinned foreigner's notice. Mr. Billingham paused on the pretence of lighting a cigarette. He saw the young man who had been reading the newspaper rise to his feet and he heard the exchange of a few sentences in the strangest language to which he had ever listened. After a moment or two, the foreigner, with a curious little bow, resumed his seat, and the elderly gentleman, who had accosted him, turned towards the gardens. Mr. Billingham, as he passed, beamed at him amiably.

"If I'm not taking a liberty, sir," he said, "I should very much like to know what language that might have been you were talking just now. Don't seem to me that I've ever heard it before."

"I don't suppose you have, sir," was the not ungracious reply. "I don't suppose there's another white man in the place except myself who can speak it. It's the language of a God-forsaken little country right at the back end of Mesopotamia. I had a draft of the natives in a regiment I commanded during the war."

Mr. Billingham fell into step with his companion and signified his interest monosyllabically.

"Gave me quite a start to see that young man seated there in European clothes," the latter continued. "This place is full, of course, of Anglo-Indians, and there are a few Egyptians, but an Arab of that young man's race very seldom finds his way into civilisation. Damned fine fellows they are, too, most of them!"

"Did he explain his presence here?" Mr. Billingham enquired.

His companion smiled — a smile with which was associated a slight grimace.

"He did not," he admitted. "He seemed rather disturbed at my recognition, but in the politest possible manner he told me to go to the devil. . . . I wish you good-morning, sir. I am due at my barber's." . . .

The Marquis de Félan, Mr. Billingham's friend and confederate, was in high spirits that evening. He had won almost as much in the afternoon on his two favorite numbers as he had lost the evening before, and he insisted upon paying for the dinner with the money which he had previously borrowed from his guest.

"At roulette," he declared didactically, "all that is needed is confidence. I say to myself 'my

numbers will arrive—they shall arrive.' I see them arriving and behold they follow one another. But for the unfortunate closing of the tables in the Club at eight o'clock I firmly believe that my winnings this evening would have been enormous."

"You did pretty well as it was, didn't you?" Mr. Billingham asked.

The Marquis hesitated.

"I was on the point of doing well,' he confided. "I had re-established myself. A little more capital—"

"As a matter of fact," Mr. Billingham interrupted, "a little more capital is what we all need. What about you, Miss Madelon?"

Madelon opened her purse and disclosed its contents.

"I am, what you call, nearly on the rocks," she admitted. "I have a hundred-franc note, perhaps two hundred francs' worth of counters, and a five-hundred-franc note at home in my stocking."

"At home," the Marquis repeated disconsolately. "I was rather hoping—"

"Quite impossible," Madelon pronounced firmly. 'My last five hundred francs does not go to the tables. Dear chief,' she went on, turning to her neighbour, "the time has arrived for us to act. Is there nobody here we can rob?"

Mr. Billingham shook his head sorrowfully.

"I can think of no one," he confessed, "whom we can rob safely and honestly."

"One might perhaps draw the line a little less rigidly," the Marquis suggested, polishing his eyeglass.

"I'm not out to look for trouble," Mr. Billingham grunted. "No thank you! I guess if you're up a gum tree, Marquis, the croupiers at the Sporting Club have raked in the bits. I myself have not touched that whip-up for charity we worked Mrs. Groosens for. And as for Madelon, you know her position."

Madelon shrugged her shoulders with a little gesture of despair. The Marquis hastened to explain.

"A loan, my dear" he insisted. "I owe you money. I admit it. All shall be paid. In the meantime, however, our need for capital is somewhat urgent. I am delighted to hear that our friend is in a position to make us a small advance if necessary."

"Mr. Billingham is in a position to do nothing of the sort," Madelon replied. "You have borrowed all my money, uncle. That must be enough for you. Think of some way of earning it. We will all help. We are an amazing trio—unscrupulous, clever, brave! We are surrounded by pleasure-seekers and fools. There must

be some means by which they can be induced to add to our exchequer."

"Guess it's up to you to sound the tocsin, Marquis," Mr. Billingham declared. "You need the money. We don't happen to, just at the moment. Do you get me?"

The Marquis coughed.

"In a partnership like ours," he began, "a certain community of interest as regards—"

"Cut it out!" Mr. Billingham interrupted brutally. "You've had your share of everything we've done. You've borrowed from me. If you can't win, quit it!"

"One needs capital," the Marquis complained. "Besides playing my numbers I have perfected a system which will infallibly bring me in a profit as soon as I get started."

"Sell it to one of my fellow-countrymen," Mr. Billingham advised. "There are three or four hundred of them landing tomorrow morning. Three or four hundred Americans plumb full of the stuff, with fat pocket-books and large letters of credit!"

The Marquis' eyes glistened wistfully as he toyed with his eyeglass. Suddenly he arrived at an heroic decision.

"I shall go down to the quay," he announced. "I shall offer my services as guide. I will compete with that brawny ruffiian from Cook's."

Mr. Billingham smiled incredulously. He said nothing, but the effect of the smile was potent.

"You think that I would not do that?" his *vis-à-vis* demanded.

"I'll match you a mille you don't," was the prompt challenge.

The Marquis hesitated from a moment, gulped and made up his mind.

"Your wager is accepted," he declared. "The money will be mine."

Almost as he spoke the siren of the great incoming steamer rang out its blatant announcement, dwarfing all other noises, audible from Mentone to Beaulieu. Mr. Billingham smiled once more.

"Guess you don't need to worry, Marquis," he observed. "No one will be allowed to land until to-morrow morning. The first tender-full will arrive in the harbour at about nine o'clock, with money oozing out of their finger-nails."

"I shall be there," was the other's valiant pronouncement.

Amongst several hundreds of intrepid transatlantic sight-seers, there stepped from the tender on to the dock at Monaco, the following morning, the illustrious family of the Henry P. Hoo-

termans of Chicago. The family consisted of Mrs. Henry P. Hooterman, a short, squat lady with an immense capacity for speech, pushing in a crowd, and managing her own and everyone else's affairs. She was of dark complexion, sallow, and she wore huge tortoiseshell spectacles. She carried a jewel case, which was somewhat ostentatiously chained to her wrist, and in the other hand an umbrella. She had flat feet which seemed to always take up a little more than their share of room upon the earth, and a voice and mien of authority which had won for her the position of President of the Society of Women Thinkers in her home city. She was accompanied by her daughter, Mamie, who had some claim to good looks and whose eyes were certainly dark and almost beautiful, but whose chances of success in life were considerably handicapped by the maternal environment. There were also a younger daughter, Sadie, still in her early teens, freckled, loquacious and gawky; a lad, who bitterly resented the whole undertaking; and finally Mr. Henry T. Hooterman himself, a tall, thin man, sombrely dressed, of pallid complexion, who had more the appearance of a Methodist minister than the multi-millionaire he was reputed to be. This estimable quintette stood upon the landing-stage and looked around them.

"What we need," Mrs. Henry P. Hooterman said firmly, "to give us points about this place, is a Cook's man. Hi, you-" she added, lifting her umbrella and addressing an individual in a gold-lace cap. "Say, are you Cook's or American Express?"

The functionary in question, who happened to be one of the five officers of the standing army of Monaco and ignorant of any of the barbarian tongues, turned coldly away. The boy, looking upwards, espied a familiar sight.

"Say," he exclaimed, "there's a trolley-car up there I guess if we can make the road we can have a ride round."

"Anyway," his father decided, "we'll be moving along."

It was at this precise moment that the Marquis, who had been talking for a moment to the ship's doctor, with whom he had some slight acquaintance, approached. He raised his hat and addressed Mrs. Henry P. Hooterman in his own language.

"Madame is perhaps in need of some information?" he suggested.

They all looked at him blankly; Mamie in frank admiration.

"Say, ain't they some dressers, momma!" she exclaimed.

"Isn't he cute!" Sadie echoed.

"Sorry we don't get you," Mr. Hooterman apologised. "We're

Americans."

The Marquis removed his hat once more.

"It is for that reason," he explained in English, "that I have ventured to address you. It appeared to me that you might be in need of some information or advice. I am a resident here. My services are at your disposal."

The little party were at once interested.

"Want to show us round, eh?" Mr. Hooterman ventured doubtfully.

"That would give me great pleasure," the Marquis assented. "I might add that I only offer my services occasionally. I believe I have the honour to address Senator Henry P. Hooterman of Chicago."

So far as the countenance of a man whose skin was rather like dried-up leather could express emotion, it was obvious that Mr. Hooterman was pleased. He smiled in wintry fashion.

"You know me," he observed.

"Monte Carlo was apprised of your intended visit," the Marquis rejoined with trenchant grandiloquence. "It was to meet you that I am here. I am not, it is true, a professional guide, but I sometimes occupy that position to people of distinction. My services are at your disposal for the day for the sum of five hundred francs."

"Steep!" Mr. Hooterman commented.

"He talks some!" Mr. Hooterman agreed.

"I think it would be lovely to be taken round by someone who really knows the place," Miss Mamie cooed.

"That will include your meals and all gratuities?" Mrs. Hooterman enquired.

"It will be inclusive," the Marquis promised. "If you decide to engage me I am at your disposal. Otherwise," he added, glancing across the quay towards another little group——

"Those horrid Smithsons!" Mamie interrupted. "Dad, fix this up, please."

"You are engaged," Mr. Hooterman declared. "Lead on. What shall we do first?" . . .

Many a time in later days the Marquis' tone shook with emotion when he spoke of that morning. It is certain that he carried out his task manfully. He deposited the little company in an automobile and took them to the Casino. He obtained their *cartes d'entrée* in advance of a long line of their fellow-passengers—a fact which immensely impressed the elder members of the family. He explained the game—to the details of which they listened with great earnestness—and at his suggestion Mr. Hooterman changed a note for a hundred dollars into counters,

which, with the exception of a small handful which he retained for purposes of instruction, the Marquis distributed amongst his companions.

"Now," he said, "I will show you how the betting is done."

He placed one of the counters on fourteen and one on twenty-nine. One which Mamie thrust upon him he placed on "red." They all watched breathlessly. The Marquis gave a little start as the ball slipped into its place and the croupier's monotonous voice recited the result.

"Quatorze, pair, rouge et manque."

The Marquis leaned gallantly across, picked up two louis from the "rouge" and handed them to Miss Mamie.

"You have won, mademoiselle," he announced. "So, it appears, have I."

He accepted thirty-five louis and swept them into his pocket. Mr. Hooterman watched him, fascinated. Mrs. Hooterman nudged her husband. Mamie smiled rapturously.

"Say, did you win all that?" she exclaimed.

"I did," the Marquis acquiesced blandly. "By the by, the original louis belongs to your father. Pray take it and place it where you will upon the table."

He returned the counter and explained further the system of staking. Several more ventures were essayed without result. Then, as it had been necessary to leave the boy and Sadie outside, they quitted the rooms and embarked upon a personally conducted drive to La Turbie and Mentone, winding up outside the Arcade which led to Ciro's. The Marquis, who had been sitting in front, gallantly helped Mrs. Hooterman and Mamie to alight.

"It is, perhaps, the luncheon hour," he ventured.

"Yes, sirree," Mamie assented enthusiastically and with great emphasis.

"You spoke a mouthful, Mr. Guide," Henry junior declared.

The Marquis was puzzled, but gathered that his suggestion was favourably received. They made their way along the Arcade until they were met by a *maître d'hôtel* from the restaurant. The season was waning and they were welcome guests. The manager himself ushered them to a table upon the balcony.

"With what can I have the pleasure of serving Monsieur le Marquis?" he enquired, presenting the bill of fare.

One and all, the little party looked up in amazement. The Marquis found them strangely acquiescent in the matter of the luncheon he ordered. They did not even flinch at the idea of cocktails. As soon as the waiter had departed Mamie leaned for-

ward.

"Why did that man with the black tie call you 'Marquis'?" she demanded.

"It happens to be the title which belongs to me," the Marquis explained, dropping his horn-rimmed eyeglass and gazing amiably around. The luncheon he had ordered consisted, curiously enough, of all his favourite dishes and he felt at peace with the world.

"You mean that you are a real Marquis—a nobleman?" Mamie persisted.

"My family has been noble for seven hundred years," the Marquis replied modestly, yet with some dignity. "I am the eleventh Marquis de Félan and I happen to be also a Count of the Holy Roman Empire."

"Say, what are you doing in this guide business, anyway?" Mr. Hooterman queried, after a moment's awed silence.

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I am not in the guide business," he declared. "To tell you the truth I have never before undertaken such an enterprise. I happen to be temporarily somewhat embarrassed financially and a friend of mine—a compatriot of yours, by the by—bet me a considerable sum of money that I would not offer my services to a family from your steamer and show them Monte Carlo. I took the liberty," he went on, with a little bow towards Mamie, "of showing some discrimination, and—well, *nous voilà!*"

"Why, did you ever hear anything like this?" Mamie exclaimed.

"Shucks!" her younger sister murmured.

"Say, don't you wear anything if you're a Marquis?" Henry junior asked discontentedly.

"I knew he wasn't an ordinary guide," Mrs. Hooterman confided under her breath to her husband.

"Here, by the by," the Marquis continued, in high good-humour, "comes the gentleman with whom I made the wager and my niece. Permit me," he he added, as Mr. Billingham and Madelon paused on their way to a table, "to present my niece and Mr. Billingham—Mr. Henry P. Hooterman and family."

Mr. Hooterman held out his hand and gazed earnestly at his compatriot.

"Linoleum?" he asked.

"You've said it," was the prompt assent.

"Boots," Mr. Hooterman confided.

"I know the plant," Mr. Billingham declared. "The Hooterman, Steadman Plant, Chicago."

"Sit right down, you and the young lady," Mr. Hooterman in-

vited. "We've just heard of that wager of yours. Join us in a bite of luncheon, sir."

Places were laid and a curious but interesting meal was started. Madelon sat between Mamie and her younger sister and enjoyed herself immensely. Mrs. Hooterman told the Marquis all about the Women's Guild and how she became President, and Mr. Billingham discoursed eloquently on financial subjects. They were perhaps half-way through a very excellent repast when Ben Hassim, with half a dozen carpets hung from his shoulders in picturesque fashion, made his smiling and dignified appearance.

"The gentleman would like to take home to New York something wonderful—a carpet fit for a palace?" he enquired, displaying one of his rugs.

"Say, did you ever!" Mrs. Hooterman exclaimed, gazing hard through her tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles. "What sort of a foreigner might he be, Marquis?"

"Either an Arab or an Egyptian," the Marquis replied. "He probably comes from somewhere beyond Jaffa."

"He looks quite romantic!" Mamie sighed. "Momma, that's a beautiful blue rug."

"A thousand francs," Ben Hassim declared, smoothing it down—"in your country a thousand dollars. I take it to the steamer for you."

Mrs. Hooterman fell to examining the texture of the carpet, and Mr. Hooterman began to make facetious suggestions as to possible reductions in the price. Suddenly Mamie gave a little exclamation.

"The Prince!" she exclaimed. "Isn't he handsome?"

They all glanced along the terrace. A man, tall, olive-skinned, with the thin aquiline nose and brilliant eyes of an Arab, dressed in robes of flowing white, with a white turban and gold bracelets upon his arms, advanced in leisurely fashion towards one of the empty tables, followed by a servant. The vendor of carpets dropped his wares and performed a strange, genuflectory reverence, to which the other replied only by a slight upraising of his hand. He passed on to the empty table and seated himself with the servant behind his chair.

"Say, do you folk know who that is?" Mr. Billingham enquired with interest.

"He's a Sheik or Prince from somewhere in Mesopotamia," Mamie declared. "He got on the steamer at Jaffa. They said that he had flown from Bagdad in an aeroplane which belonged to the British Government. Isn't he just

the most picturesque dear that ever lived?"

Mr. Billingham nodded a little absently. There were other things interesting him just at that moment. In the first place, Leonard Powell, the Englishman who had been occupying a table in a distant corner, had risen to his feet and was gazing across with eager interest at the object of Mamie's admiration. Furthermore, the young foreigner who had been seated outside the Robespierre Hotel earlier in the morning, had also made his appearance in the Arcade accompanied by a smaller, coarser and more vicious edition of himself. The two had paused, half-way between the bar and the terrace restaurant, and were talking together eagerly. Their whole attention also seemed concentrated upon the Arab Sheik, who never once glanced in their direction. . . . Then, too, a change had come over Ben Hassim. He had dropped his wares and his eyes were fixed in almost terrified fashion upon the two newcomers. His rugs lay in a little neglected heap upon the floor. He mumbled to himself in some strange dialect. Continually he looked backwards and forwards from the spot where the two had halted to the table where the Arab Prince was seated. The climax of his disquietude arrived when the taller of the former, followed by his unprepossessing companion, began to move forward. Mr. Billingham half unconsciously rose to his feet. He felt the need of freedom in case action was required of him, yet of what might be going to happen he had not the faintest idea. It was Henry junior who first supplied a hint as to the possible course of the proceedings.

"Say, isn't that a dandy dagger!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Mr. Billingham's eyes followed the direction of the boy's eagerly pointing finger. Ben Hassim had retained one of the rugs upon his arm, and beneath its folds, partially concealed, his righ hand was gripping a long, curved knife of wicked-looking blue steel, the hilt of which was of beaten silver, set with precious stones. With the rug still hanging over his arm, he moved stealthily out until he stood almost as though it were his purpose to intercept the two Europeanised Arabians. The manager of the restaurant, conscious of something unusual, hurried up with an angry exclamation. Ben Hassim took no notice. His eyes were fixed upon the advancing figures. Suddenly he began to talk rapidly in French to the manager. The latter appeared at first bewildered and then in-

credulous. Finally he turned away towards the two young foreigners whom the carpet vendor was indicating now with almost frantic gestures. He bowed, as though welcoming prospective clients.

"You wish for a table on the terrace, sir?" he enquired.

The foremost of the two young men hesitated. Ben Hassim took advantage of his pause to creep round the other tables and emerge upon the Arcade with one rug still hanging over his arm, effectually concealing the knife which only Henry junior and Mr. Billingham had seen. He stood between the table where the Prince was seated, and the civilised parody of himself, about whose deliberate approach there had been indeed something almost sinister. The latter, checked in his advance by the manager, was led reluctantly to a table. Ben Hassim turned and with head respectfully bowed commenced to talk to the Prince—to talk in a strange language with many gestures and brandishing of the arms, almost with tears in his eyes. The Prince listened without movement, without any sign of hearing. In the end, however, he rose to his feet, and, screened still by the carpet vendor, turned and entered the indoors portion of the restaurant. Hassim stood in the entrance, breathing heavily, drops of perspiration upon his dusky forehead, agitated yet triumphant. The manager came across to him, frowning.

"There are things here," Hassim said, "which you may not understand—nor even I, wholly. You wish to avoid trouble in this restaurant. Go, then, and bring the Englishman to me who sits at the corner table."

The manager was angry. He had a shrewd idea as to what it was that Hassim held in his hand beneath that rug.

"If there is any brawling here," he threatened, "never again shall you bring your rugs to my clients."

"That will be as Allah directs," was the quiet reply. "Send or seek that Englishman."

The manager, with a shrug of his shoulders, turned away and approached the young Englishman who had risen from his place but had seemed for the last few seconds uncertain how to act. Mr. Billingham, who had been watching his two nearer neighbours, turned to his companions.

"Will you folk just excuse me one moment?" he begged. "I want to say a word to our dusky friend there."

He made his way to the adjoining table, and, uninvited, took the third chair. Neither the

young man whom he had seen earlier in the morning, nor his more villainous-looking companion, indulged in any immediate comment upon this very singular behaviour. The former simply looked at the new-comer with expressionless face and eyes from which even enquiry was absent, but the latter's right hand stole promptly underneath the tablecloth and remained out of sight.

"Say, you understand plain English, don't you?" Mr. Billingham asked.

"Naturally," was the calm reply.

"If you don't put your right hand upon the table this second," Mr. Billingham declared, "I'll take you by the scruff of the neck and throw you out, and your gun after you!"

Mr. Billingham's arm was outstretched; a strong, muscular arm. The little Arab with the squinting eyes looked into this intruder's face and decided that it was without doubt the face of a man who meant what he said. He was prompt to obey.

"Now we can talk," Mr. Billingham continued, his eyes straying for a moment to the corner where the Englishman was standing irresolute, leaning upon his stick. "I'm taking a hand in a game I don't quite tumble to, but I guess I'll see it through. You're going to sit here quietly opposite me for another three minutes and let things rip."

"Who are you and why do you interfere?" the taller of the two young Arabs demanded. "What is your interest in this matter?"

"I guess you'd better not be too inquisitive," was the curt reply.

The young man watched with sullen eyes the Englishman, who, with the manager by his side, was now making his way towards the restaurant. He looked back at Mr. Billingham.

"If you knew what was going on there," he said, pointing significantly towards the entrance to the restaurant——

Mr. Billingham, not wholly, but partially fell. Ever so slightly he turned his head in the direction indicated. Instantly the younger of the two Arabs, with a movement of incredible swiftness, stooped and half rose again. The sun, which was streaming in through the glass windows, flashed upon his silver-plated pistol. Quick though he was, however, he was not quick enough. With a sudden terrible blow, Mr. Billingham struck and pinned his hand to the table. The pistol clattered harmlessly on to the floor. The young man's eyes glared. There was murder in his

face. He dived, sprang to his feet, swayed one way and another. In Mr. Billingham's Herculean grip, however, he was helpless. A couple of waiters hurried forward, followed by the manager. One of them picked up the pistol.

"What is the matter?" the manager demanded.

"Nothing, so long as we don't let him move," Mr. Billingham replied. "There's some trouble going on. I can't get the hang of it, but this little one is the guy who meant mischief.

The Englishman emerged from the restaurant, with a smile of triumph upon his face. He waved his hand to Mr. Billingham. Then, recognising that something unusual had happened, he came over to the table.

"Are you through with your little job?" Mr. Billingham enquired.

"I am," was the prompt reply, "and jolly glad of it, too! . . . Is there anything wrong here?" he added, with a curious glance at Mr. Billingham's companions.

"There might have been if I hadn't taken a chance," Mr. Billingham acquiesced.

"You had better let him go," the taller of the two young Arabs advised, breaking at last his long and impassive silence. "Our task is over. We have failed. The evil has come. The message has been delivered. All that we desire is to depart. I pledge you my word that my brother is now safe. He carries the symbol! He may not be touched!"

Mr. Billingham released his grip, and, in obedience to a sign from the manager, the *vestiaire* brought the two young men their hats and sticks. Very slowly they made their way back down the Arcade and disappeared. Ben Hassim stepped forward from the threshold of the restaurant. Once more he took up his place by the side of his little pile of carpets. Once more that smile illuminated his face.

"It was the great chief of my tribe," he explained. "I had to pay my respects. It is a happy day, this. I will say eight hundred francs. The carpet to you shall be as a thank-offering."

"Delivered down to the steamer?"

"You pay me when I bring it," was the dignified response.

"Say, what about that knife?" Henry junior demanded. "Buy that for me, dad."

"Knife?" Hassim repeated, shaking his head slowly and extending his arms. "I carry no knife. One lives in peace on this side of the blue sea."

Less than a mile from the land, the great steamer lay at anchor, blazing with lights. Twice her siren had made the night hideous. Now, with puffing

and snorting, the last tender, filled with passengers, had left the harbour. The Marquis, well-content, replaced his hat upon his head, lit a cigarette, and stuffed, with amusement, his five hundred francs into his pocket. Hassim gathered up his rugs one by one, after a final glance into the brown leather pocket-book where eight hundred francs were safely bestowed. It had been a great day for him. Suddenly he felt a hand upon his shoulder. He looked round quickly and perhaps it was some revival of an ancient instinct which sent his right hand down to the folds of his robe. When he recognised Mr. Billingham, however, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Hassim, my friend," Mr. Billingham begged, "put me wise to what has been happening. Curiosity disturbs my digestion. And let me remind you of this. I, too, had a hand in the game. It was I who found the Englishman recovering from his drugs outside the Café de Paris this morning."

Hassim nodded gravely.

"They come from the land which was once mine," he explained. "He, the Prince, who to-night is in the air—for he flies back from Nice to Jaffa and thence to the valleys where his kingdom lies—and the others, one of whom was his brother."

Mr. Billingham was patient.

"The Englishman brought a letter or something of the sort," he suggested.

Ben Hassim looked around him. They were walking very slowly along the quay. Perhaps the weight of his rugs was great.

"Listen," he said. "Years ago, before the great war, there came to the country where I was born—a great kingdom it was, and is, and ever will be—one of those strange Englishmen who seek for wealth. He stayed nearly a year with the King, the father of the Prince and that other. He paid money which made the Kingdom of my country richer in camels and horses and women and jewellery than any other, and he took in exchange the land where the oil was. But before he left, so that the King might not go back on his bargain, he took with him the secret token, without which no man can be crowned King."

"The secret token?" Mr. Billingham repeated. "I don't get you."

"It is an image of the first king of my country—two thousand years old—beaten in gold," the vendor of carpets continued solemnly. "In it there are emeralds for eyes, rubies for lips, and pearls for teeth, yet so thin is it that a man might carry it in his pocketbook.

"They took it to England, but when they came to sink the wells

and the pledge should have been redeemed, the war came. That other—the youngest son of the King—he chose what they call, civilisation. He came to England, to school and to college. The Prince remained. Last year the King died."

"Tell me the name of this country."

Hassim shook his head.

"Since I left it, I speak of it no longer," he declared. "The King, as I told you, died. That other had become what you see him—a western creature. He made favour with the Ministers in England. He sought for the throne of his father—the throne which belonged to the Prince—but the Prince, though this is the first time he has ever left his country, was the chosen of the people. He sent to those who owned the token. The land was theirs. The war was over. These English were honest men. The other, he too tried for the token. By arrangement—I know not whose—they sent it here. The other followed him. Because he might not raise his hand against his brother, he brought with him a friend of evil repute. If he could take back the token the kingship was his. He failed." . . .

The Marquis caught them up. He was in high spirits.

"Madelon waits for us at the Café de Paris," he told Mr. Billingham. "We have supper together and you will pay me a thousand francs. The family of Hooterman were well pleased with me. La belle Mamie has presented me with her photograph, Madame has invited me to Chicago, and Monsieur added a benefice to my fee. If you will give me what you owe me, my friend, I may consider paying for our supper."

They took a little *voiture* and drove up to the Café de Paris. After the strain of the earlier part of the day, they found themselves singularly gay. At the next table, Hassim was stroking one of his beautiful rugs as he displayed it to a little party of new arrivals. The brother of the Prince was dancing with a professional *danseuse*. The Marquis, who was still in high spirits, called for the wine waiter.

"I am appreciating the joy," he explained to his companions, "of leisure and recreation after toil. You others, what have you done? I, on the contrary, have gained—when you, my friend Billingham, have paid me—fifteen hundred francs."

"I," Mr. Billingham protested, "have also been busy. I have saved the life of a Prince."

"And I" Madelon sighed "have heard all about her Women's Guild from Mrs. Henry P. Hooterman of Chicago."

"I will pay for the wine," the Marquis decided.

two muscovy ducks

by Charles Norman

THE farmhouse stood on eroded soil about fifty feet from the road. From its single chimney vaporous smoke rose like an elongated ghost. Beyond the house, against the rise of a hill, loomed a barn.

The first flakes were falling when Oscar Phipps arrived. It was four o'clock. He glanced around. The sky seemed to be thronged with something besides snow; it was closing in on him. He did not like the look of things, chiefly the falling snow; it could make the return walk difficult. Still, he thought to himself, he was there, he had made the walk in about the time he had estimated, and he knew every foot of the way.

Nothing like walking, he told his friends: beats golf, beats swimming, you just go on and on, breathing God's pure air, exercising every part of your body as you walked and swung your hands. He had seen the countryside in all weathers, all seasons,

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and it pleased him to think he knew what everyone did or raised on the back roads where his walks led him.

He started toward the house. Holes in the path and crevices in the ground were beginning to be laced with white.

He came to the back door, wondering what was holding the house together, although it was obvious it had held together for a long time. Discolored boards and strips of tin made a patchwork of front and sides, and the wind beating against them in swirls of white shook and rattled walls, windows and eaves. For a moment Oscar Phipps hesitated, then he rapped loudly with his gloved hand.

It seemed a long minute before he heard someone fumbling with the latch; then the door opened about a foot. A woman was peering out at him. Her white hair was drawn back tightly against her skull, and from a steep expanse of brow sunken eyes held him in their gaze. Her nose was long and sharp, and she was wearing a man's tweed jacket and soiled dungarees. Tall as she was, her hand on the door post seemed out of proportion to the rest of her; it was large, bony and raw, and suggestive of great strength.

"Excuse me," Oscar Phipps said, speaking rapidly, to tell his errand and get away. "I have some friends coming for Thanksgiving, and I thought I'd give them a treat, something unusual —you know, not just ducks, but muscovy ducks. I understand you raise them. I'd like to buy two."

The woman continued to peer at him, then reached inside, donned a man's cap and closed the door. Oscar Phipps fell in behind her as she headed for the barn. She walked with powerful strides. There was, he estimated, half an inch of snow on the ground; above him, the sky teemed with gray and white flakes.

The barn was a more solidly built structure than the farmhouse. High and broad, with sloping roof, it loomed like a fortress in the dusk made by the snow. Inside, as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he could see them, scores of white shapes squatting or waddling about; a few were fluttering or flying in all directions.

"How far did you drive?" the woman asked. It was a country voice, without inflection.

"Walked," he told her. "About five miles."

She made no comment. They were standing beside a coop.

"Good walking—so far," he added. "I'd like to start back as soon as possible." He hoped she would understand.

"Quiet, you!" the old woman

shouted. Oscar Phipps stared at her, startled, then realized she had not spoken to him. He looked in the direction of her gaze, and saw, some twenty feet away, in the middle of the barn, a pen about four feet high, and inside it the massive shapes of heaving flank and haunch. At the same time he became aware of a low, deep-throated chorus of animal grunts. It was coming from the pen. Between the bars snouts protruded in his direction, and he could now make out the glitter and gleams of wild and frightened stares—stares which seemed to be fixed on him. There were no ducks near the pen.

"I didn't know you raised pigs," he said.

"They're not pigs," the old woman said sharply. "Boars!"

"Must be hard to feed in winter," he offered lamely. She gave him an odd look, then opened a door in the coop, reached in, and yanked out two muscovy ducks. Her hand encircled four legs. The ducks hung like plummets in her grasp.

"What do you do with them?" he asked.

"Cut off their heads," she replied. "Here," she commanded, "just hold them for me."

His gloved hands closed around their legs, but their unexpected struggle to be free made his arms fly out, and at that moment his hat, stiffening with frost, fell from his head. The blow of the ax caught him dead center. As he toppled forward, the two muscovy ducks, their feathers streaked with blood, fell in an awkward heap on their sides, then bounded to the far end of the barn, giving the pen a wide berth. At the same time, from the wild-eyed boars, came a long, low, eerie whine.

The old woman wiped the blade with a rag. The whine grew in intensity as she knelt beside the body of Oscar Phipps to strip it. The gloves took a long time.

By the barn door, which she opened just enough to squeeze through, she reached for an overhanging rope. A single jerk unlatched the pen. The whining suddenly ceased, and for a moment there was silence in the barn.

Then the boars rushed out.

shifting sands

by Walt and Leigh Richmond

My name is Pete Sands. I'm a reporter and I cover everything but weddings and the stork. That doesn't mean as much excitement as it sounds. Centerville's small, and the unusual doesn't happen here often. Sometimes, but not often.

This was one of those times.

It began early that morning, when George stopped at the Herald-Star building to give me a tip. He's tipped me on stories before, and it's meant five bucks or a bottle for him whenever I was in the chips. So he took his cab eight blocks out of the way and caught me just as I was leaving to get on my beat.

Fifteen minutes before, he told me, on their way back from the airport, Clark Patterson and Emerson Bean had used his cab as a sparring grounds. It wasn't just an argument, George said positively. It was a knock-down, drag-em-out fight, even if it had been just yakety-yak. They were both out for blood, he said, and

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Centerville, as the authors say, is a small town — like so many others, clear across the breadth of this land. The unusual doesn't happen there often. "Sometimes, but not often." But the men and the women who live in Centerville, whether this be Centerville, Ohio, or Centerville, California, are very much a part of their community, thinking as such . . .

it was each other's blood.

When two executives of a top-flight company are mad enough to have it out in a cab, it's worth looking into. Especially when it's Patterson and Bean. They're not the types to be public about their business, much less their emotions if any. So I climbed into the TD, which is in the nature of a collector's item but is what I support instead of a blonde, and I headed for the P & B offices, not actually fracturing the speed limits, just shaving them a little.

Patterson & Bean are the heavy industry in our town, with most of their production from government contracts; and if there's anybody here that doesn't depend on their payroll it's because he's got his own closed economy and isn't really part of the town anyway. Patterson & Bean *are* Centerville. If you don't work for them, you sell stuff to the guys that do.

Their offices are in a long, low cement block building just outside the gates of their plant. The plant itself stretches over pretty nearly a square mile, but the offices are a rather small, neat building, landscaped with poinsettias and shrubs.

I walked in and past the receptionist as if I owned the place, and since her sister's a cub on the society desk and is right impressed with me, she didn't do more than make protesting noises.

I went through the bookkeeping offices. It's a ball-room size place with business machines lined up like a production line. Each machine has a blonde poking its buttons, and each blonde looks as if she'd been turned out by a machine for turning out manicured blondes. I'd known those kids when they were individual little girls, but poking buttons on machines does much the same thing to individuals that beauty parlors do, and then I can't tell them one from another.

I sidestepped an undersized male with papers in his hands who was bustling through the aisles ahead of me. There was a short hall, and then the partners' private offices.

The outer office in the suite is the secretary's. I made to walk right on through, but the gal there was too fast on her feet. Her I didn't know, so she must have been a recent import. Tiny and inoffensive-looking, but she blocked me out of the path to the inner sanctum as neatly as a pro in a football game. She smiled up at me, quite firmly planted in my path. I'd have had to knock her down to get by.

"Who shall I say is calling?" she asked brightly, as if blocking uncivilized intrusions were a normal part of her day's work

and certainly not something to faze her.

"Pete Sands, Herald-Star," I said shortly. "I believe I'm expected."

Okay I'm an expectable part of any critical situation in Centerville. Wherefore I am expected, it says here.

She pushed a button on an intercom and announced me, and the voice that answered to tell her I should wait was such a vicious snarl I figured George's report had been more than normally accurate.

But I was effectively stopped and had to sit there cooling my heels and waiting for a break. Any break. I had nearly gotten through and had been stopped by a bantam-weight, and I was mad. I pictured that secretary thoroughly deceased, cute as she was, in every painful way I could dream up, and ten years a reporter have left me with a fairly vivid imagination on that score. I must have looked my feelings at least enough to make her uncomfortable, because pretty quick she gets her purse from a drawer and heads out of the office, skirting my part of the room as if it were poisonous. Which it was.

The door was barely closed behind her when I had the key on the intercom down. And hit pay dirt. The voice that came through was a fury of violence.

". . . reporter's out there waiting. You've stalled for two days and I'm calling you right now. If you won't play straight I'll give him the story."

Another voice came back, vicious. "You can't do it! We've got a right to survive too! It's them or us. Think what it means —our wives, our children! If you can't think of your own family, think of your employes. They've got families too. You can't do it!"

"Oh can't I? You write it, or I call the guy in. If you want to see whether I'll do it, just don't start that letter."

There was a long silence, a deathly sort of complete stillness that was as chilling as anything I've ever listened to in a movie. If you can call listening to a silence listening. Then:

"All right." It was a murderous snarl. It was bitterness and terror and resignation all in two words

"I'll call in Julie. You're going to write it before that reporter leaves. I'm not taking chances on your stalling again."

"For God's sake, you dictate this to Julie you'll have it all over town and you might just as well tell the guy out there yourself. At least have the decency to leave us a private funeral. That'll give us about two months' start to sell out the company before anybody finds out.

She knows too much already. She may be the most dependable secretary in the United States of America, but there isn't a female here or in Asia that can keep its mouth shut. I'll write your blasted letter, but I'll write it by hand."

"And I'll mail it. You needn't think you can lose it after it's written.

"Okay. You mail it. But you'll wish you hadn't. I'll find a way out of myself. You and your saintly 'honor' can go down with the ship. I need a drink."

The secretary caught me listening. She came back in on that one, and there I was glued to the intercom. I didn't even hear her until her hand flipped my nose out of the way to switch it off, leaving a nice gory scratch behind. She didn't say a word, just headed for the inner office. As I said, a fast gal on her feet.

"I wouldn't if I were you," I told her sweetly

She stopped with her hand on the doorknob, and I went on. "There's a quarrel in there would put an exhibition at the Garden to shame. You can tell 'em what a bad boy I am later when there's not so much personal danger involved."

She got the personal danger hint. She glared icicles, but she sat down. Pretty soon she made herself busy, and I just sat, my story out the window. I'd lucked into—well, you could hardly call it luck when you've worked for years to get every cabby in town on your side, and to put a pipeline into every politician's office. But my work was ready to pay off big dividends, only I couldn't get to the dividends. They were locked into a panelled office in the hands of the two closest-mouth guys this side of the Mississippi. This was a wire story and a hot one, and it reached up big from the implications in those voices.

The hell with the wires. This was something that meant the future of Centerville, and Centerville is my town. People can call me hardboiled or nosey or anything they like, but this is my town and it's my job to protect it by letting the people know. It sounds corny, but that's how it really is. But letting the people know what? Know that something was happening big enough to hold all their futures at stake? Oh yeah? You can't tell a story you can't prove. I had to *know* before I so much as breathed that there *was* a story.

She didn't look like the kind to talk, but a guy can try. Quick and cute, this Julie, with a stubborn set to her chin.

"Nice day today," I said, just so she'd hear the sound of my voice.

There was no answer to that one. I was going to have to give it the full treatment to get any reaction at all.

"By the way, have you got your notice yet? You ought to get a month's notice. Some of the guys won't be so lucky. Two weeks at the most."

It brought her head up. Snapped it up is more like it. She knew I was a reporter and she knew I'd walked in "expected". And that was all she did know. Play that against insecurity, which showed plainly in the way she took the bait, I might get somewhere. I'm nobody's liar and it shows, which would help.

I just sat. Never scare your fish by reaching for 'em.

She made a pass at going back to being busy, but it was too much for her. She gargled a couple of times, though, before she came out with it.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh? The word's not out yet then? You mean they're going to let you read it in the paper before they tell you? That's—but I reckon I'm talking out of turn. Forget it."

She struggled with her inner self for a few minutes. You gotta expect that. Takes time for people to make a decision, even when it's obvious which way they'll make it. I knew by the way she acted she didn't know what was happening in there—maybe not as much as I did. In fact, probably not. But she knew things I didn't know, so I played my fish. Gently, letting her do the work, letting her try to dig what I knew out of me, and implying the facts could be had. I took it easy, so it was a good half hour later before I had a date to meet her at Tony's that night. I was just securing the hatches when the intercom spoke and said for her to ask me to come another time, they were going to be tied up.

That was it. There was nothing I could do then but leave and hope I'd worm some background clue out of Julie that night.

I went straight back to the office and got out the P & B clips from the morgue. I knew everything that was public about that company, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to go through the clips. I'd written most of the Chamber-of-Commerce-style publicity when they first announced formation of the partnership and that they were headquartering in Centerville five years ago. I'd done the stories on the big opening, and followed their announcements of government contracts, which was about all you got out of them. Mostly press releases. They seldom talked to a guy direct. Close-mouthed, like I said.

I hardly knew either of them personally, but I knew a story

on Patterson that had me sold on him, and I'd gone all out to do a good public relations job for them in my copy. I couldn't tell the story—I'd got it from a pal, and it was off the record. It was a deal Patterson had pulled at the beginning of the last big war, when we didn't have planes to send to Australia and were dug in there with old kites and dummy guns. There were planes, all right, but they were held up for one part that had been dreamed up by government designers and were impossible from the word go. Patterson had had one of the contracts for that particular part, and he stuck his neck way out—he could have gone to prison for it—changed the thing into a workable design and shipped them in as the original so that the planes wouldn't be held up waiting for red tape to be cut. Then he went to Washington — once the planes were safely delivered in the Pacific—and told 'em what he'd done. That takes guts.

He's a rather unimpressive guy to meet. Medium tall, medium heavy, medium well-dressed with just enough carelessness about his person to make him comfortable to be around. No show to him at all, and he never looked well in his photographs. He had a careless voice, too, as if he didn't have to think before he said anything. Not that he said much. Courteous and all that, just said he was sorry if you asked too many questions, which I had every one of the five or six times I'd talked to him.

Bean was another matter. He was tall and as well kept as a properly manicured lawn. His suits were creased with an exactness that would have done credit to a machined part, and his shoes were always shined to a precise dulled brightness. Emily Post could have measured his correctness with calipers.

He didn't bother to be courteous, or to answer my questions at all. Any interview with him added and subtracted to "no comment". He didn't even bother to disguise the fact that he was annoyed at contact with the public, even so remotely as through a reporter. I disliked him on first sight and never saw reason to alter my opinion.

But neither of them was the type to quarrel in public. Or in private. Patterson's dignity was innate, and with Bean it was so much part of his arrogance that it would take an earthquake to blast it out. Q.E.D., there'd been an earthquake.

The last big story I'd had on P & B was six months ago when they got a contract for hush-hush parts for the Air Force's

latest jet jobs. They'd done quite a bit of hiring then, and the town was splurging on the new payroll.

"Pete!"

I looked up. I'd been pretty much absorbed re-reading my own stories, trying to make them tell me some detail I'd shelved or forgotten, and it took me a minute to see who'd called. By the time I came to, Ed was halfway to my desk.

Now editors don't come to your desk. They yell and you hop. Maybe you're drawing half again what they are, you're still a leg man, and the editor yells and you hop. But Ed was halfway to my desk. I checked the pencil and copy paper in my pocket as I jumped to meet him. Whatever it was was big.

"Emerson Bean just conked of a heart attack. Reported D.O.A. at the hospital."

"Huh?"

"What do you mean, huh? Get the lead out of your pants. What are you, a society stringer that you've gotta stop and say 'huh' at me when we're rolling in less than an hour? I'm sending Collins to the hospital for the detail. You get the hell a-hold of Patterson and the guy's wife. We've gotta have a complete obit. Line story."

I just stood there.

Heart attack? It couldn't be. Death doesn't just come when it's most convenient for somebody else. Death doesn't come on order except by violence.

But Clark Patterson! If it had been Bean that was still alive . . . I stopped myself right there. Just because you like a guy, you can't shut your eyes to facts.

It was murder. I knew that as surely as if I'd seen it done. There was murder in those voices not an hour before. And now Bean was dead.

It wasn't a heart attack. If a guy's going under to that he'll do it in the heat of a quarrel, not afterwards. But it was labelled heart attack. Maybe they knew at the hospital and were covering up. Maybe not. When a corpse is brought in that was alive and healthy that morning, and there's no obvious sign of violence, it's apt to look like a heart attack.

Ed was jibbering something at me. I interrupted, not bothering to listen for what he'd been saying. "Send Collins after the family stuff," I said. "I'm going to the hospital. There's a real story here, but I'm going to play hell getting it."

"If you're trying to do a Brenda Starr I'll have your scalp," Ed growled. "These aren't the people to start monkey shines with, and this isn't the time. The obit's going to be

in this run, and I'm not holding the run, and it's going to be a straight obit. No funny business!" Ed is about as conservative as they make 'em in the Fourth Estate.

I scrammed.

I was going to play hell getting the real story all right. I gave the internes and every nurse I could wrangle into a private conversation the works, but it still came out heart attack. If they were covering up for anybody, they were doing a complete job. Dr. Waltham, who is Mr. God out there, finally told me to get out or get thrown out.

So I headed for the Sheriff's office. I put that guy in politics, practically, and I could ask him for a favor. But I didn't have any facts to go on, and Biscayne's nobody's fool. I told him I wanted a post mortem, and he said why didn't I just ask for his resignation while I was about it? It would be fine, he said, if I proved right, but if he ordered a post mortem on Emerson Bean, it was sure death politically if I were wrong. And it added up too easy that I was wrong. It added up that way to him, anyhow.

I've known Biscayne a long time, and I know an awful lot about him. I'd never put any pressure on him, it had never occurred to me that I would. But I did this time. Call it blackmail if you like. I told him I was going to have that post mortem or else. If I could prove this was murder, I could find out what was happening to that company, and what happened to that company meant life and death to Centerville. I put the pressure on but good, and stood there listening while he ordered the post mortem. He set a coroner's inquest for 10 a.m. the next morning. Then he turned to me.

His voice was cold, formal. "You'd damned sure better be right on this, Pete. But whether you're right or whether you're wrong, you'd better completely damned sure be at that inquest. And I'm not talking through my hat."

Fair enough. I'd be there. He'd make me the goat as much as he could if I were wrong. As for the credit if I were right—well, politics is politics, and I wouldn't begrudge him.

There was nothing to do but wait, then. My paper was already at press and they'd have an obit by now, and Ed would be writing up my personal obit as a member of the staff for not reporting in. I had to be right.

I left Biscayne the number at Tony's and went on over. My date with Julie wasn't until seven, and I had no idea whether she'd show or not now,

but I needed a drink. I ordered a double bourbon neat to start on, and took it from there.

She showed. And by the time she showed I needed somebody to talk to. Comes a point when the pressure's on when you're gonna talk or blow. And the pressure was on. Waiting plays hell with a guy's nerves. So I started at the beginning and told her the whole thing through to the end, and by the time I finished I had myself pretty well convinced I was Sir Galahad out to save the town and uncover the criminal. Me. Pete Sands. Hard-boiled, freckle-faced, red haired and—well, not chunky, just sort of heavy-built. Good in any man's fight that wants to start it.

Julie got pretty well convinced herself of the Sir Galahad part. It was sticky going at first, Patterson being the sort of person he is, and the dead man rather a stinker. Maybe the bourbons helped. We were holding hands and saving the town and pretty smug withal when the call from Biscayne finally came in.

Biscayne was too mad to be frothing. He just told me in an even tone that had a hollow ground steel edge to it. The report on the post mortem had come through. Bean had died of a heart attack.

"No trace of anything?" I couldn't believe my ears. "Not poison, not nothing?"

"Not even a secret reptilian poison from a South American dart thrower," said Biscayne, the fury beginning to come out in his voice. And if you want to stay out from behind bars, don't you so much as drive one mile over the speed limit, or even look as if you might give me an excuse to put you where you belong. And if you don't show at that inquest, you'd better get across the border, because . . ."

I hung up without waiting to hear the rest I'd be at the inquest. It would be my funeral. I'd be there all right.

I told Julie. I didn't want to, but I had to. And I ordered another double bourbon fast while I told her.

Her expression didn't change. She looked at my drink, and pushed her own away.

"You too?" I asked, ready to flub on a little more sorrow at being deserted by the beautiful girl. I'd lost my job. I'd lost my standing in the town. I was going to be held up as an interfering imbecile the next morning. It seemed only fitting.

"This 'I was wrong' deal I don't buy," she said flatly.

My head came up on that. "You don't?"

"I don't. It doesn't check. Death, as you so carefully explained, is not a convenience

available to people on demand. They do it to each other when they need the other dead. It doesn't just happen. You convinced me, and I'm convinced."

She sat there thinking a moment, then turned to me. "You talked to the doctor. Did you ask him what could look like a heart attack?"

"No, but I asked one of the internes. He said it could have been asphyxiation. He said it looked remarkably like it. But of course a guy doesn't die from that in an air-conditioned office. And there were no signs of a struggle."

"I'd probably have heard a struggle if there'd been one. No, I guess I wouldn't. That office is pretty sound-tight."

"Except through the intercom," I interrupted, grinning and rubbing my nose.

She touched the scratch with a look that said it was an honorable wound, and went on. "Anyhow, I was there when he died, and there was air to breathe. I breathed it."

"What about this stuff—cure—cureable—curare? There was a mystery written around that in the supplement a few Sundays ago. Seems to me it caused asphyxiation or the symptoms of it or something. It hits the automatic nervous system. Causes asphyxiation and death in thirty seconds according to the guy that writ the story."

"Autonomic," Julie said.

"Huh?"

"The autonomic nervous system. That couldn't be it. It took about five minutes after Mr. Patterson called me in for him to die." She shuddered. "I didn't know what to do. I rubbed his wrists and patted his shoulder, but he kept turning blue. Then I had sense enough to phone for an ambulance, but he was dead, I think, before I found the phone number. He—his eyes were open and he was looking at me, but he was dead, I'm quite sure." She hastily took a drink, and I put my arm around her.

"Are there any other poisons that could cause it?" she asked after a moment.

"I don't know. I'm not much of a murder-mystery fan, and in real life they generally do it with a knife and it's messy and unpremeditated. We could ask Dave Croseyn. He's the police chemist, and he ought to know."

"We can't ask him until morning, can we? Let's go to the office now."

She said it so calmly, too. Just like that. Taking it for granted.

"We can go to the office in the morning, I suppose," I said.

She looked at me caustically. "It was a hurried job. It was done at the office. Any evidence

we could find would probably be there. If we wait until morning it will probably be gone if it's not already. I have my key."

I've been a reporter too long. Breaking and entering isn't my style. I may stick my neck out, but I do it legal-like so the only thing I'd lose is my job. But that gal—she must have nerves of steel. She was going, and I tagged along perforce. I lost my nerve twice on the drive out, but she soothed me down just enough so that I didn't actually pull off the road. After all, it was *my* story.

The building looked ghostly in the moonlight. I kept looking over my shoulder while she unlocked the front door, but there was nobody in sight. We went through the reception room with only the night light. In the room beyond, the long rows of hooded office machines looked like so many gravestones, and I felt like a ghoul stealing silently past them. Julie's office, when we opened the door, was pitch black. We felt our way to the inner door that led to the private office.

Julie switched on the lights before I had time to protest. The glare was blinding, but the room was quiet and peaceful. Panelled, sedate, hardly the setting for sudden death. I was scared. Just plain scared.

We didn't know where to start looking. We didn't even know what we were looking for. Julie went through the private files, and her hands were steady as rocks. I envied her. Mine were shaking so I had trouble picking things up. I looked through the drawers of the desk, and through the wastebasket. There were important letters and unimportant ones, but they'd all been dictated to Julie. The wastebasket yielded only the normal run of rejected paper. We looked under the desk blotter and under the rug, which was silly.

I wanted to leave, but Julie lit a cigarette and sat down on the rug, and I finally sat down beside her and lit one myself. Julie took a deep drag and watched the smoke curl up.

"If I were going to hide something like poison, I'd hide it in plain sight," she said in a slow, contemplative voice as if she had all night to think up things like this. "I'd put it in something that looked like it belonged but that wouldn't be used normally."

"Yes?" I said. I was wishing she'd hurry to make her point so we could look and get out of there. Then I yelped softly. "The liquor cabinet," I said. "It has a glass front and normal bottles, so we didn't search it."

There were glasses and a thermos of ice and a soda squirt and bourbon and scotch and bitters and gin and vermouth and a

bubble-glass mixer and a bottle of cherries and one of olives and a small can of cream of tartar.

"It's in the cream of tartar can." Julie's voice was scared for the first time. "The curare or whatever will be in it."

We put the can in one of the P & B envelopes and sealed it, and, really frightened now, we switched off the lights and headed out past the gravestone office machines and the receptionist's desk and out the big doors into the deserted street. We walked fast around the corner to the TD, and I watched for headlights following us for a good two miles.

Dawn was just breaking. Dave Croseyn wouldn't come on until eight, and the inquest was at ten, but if the poison was in that can it would be time enough for him to analyse it.

We had coffee at the dog wagon and a big breakfast at the Leicester Grill, and we walked around town in the morning sunshine watching early risers head for work and feeling warm and affectionate and still scared.

We were waiting outside his door when Dave arrived. We went in with him, and I told him about the quarrel between Patterson and Bean, and the post mortem and the works.

"And we figured," I ended up, "that he'd hide the poison in an obvious place where it wouldn't be used but would look sort of natural. This cream of tartar can was in the liquor cabinet. It could be in the can."

Dave didn't reach for the box or even move. When he spoke it was in a hesitant voice. "Clark Patterson," he said softly. "Clark Patterson. I'll be damned. He's such a hell of a swell egg, too." Then he stood up and stretched as if trying to throw off a stench. "I don't have to analyse the stuff for you," he said. "Cream of tartar's a poison in overdose. And it could be used in a drink without tasting like more than an excessive shot of bitters. And it wouldn't show up in a post mortem."

We must have looked our questions, because he explained without our asking. "Cream of tartar is potassium tartrate. Used in baking with soda, it's cancelled out. Taken straight it's absorbed into the blood and saturates the blood with carbon dioxide. The symptoms would be asphyxiation, which could easily pass as a heart attack."

He gave us a quizzical look. "Grapes are a source of cream of tartar," he said, "and if you drink much wine you know the peculiar throbbing headache you get with the hangover. That's from partial asphyxiation. Sometimes a bottle of homemade wine with too much cream of tartar left in knocks somebody off."

"But why wouldn't it show in a post mortem?"

"Why? Because immediately after death the normal potash salts in the blood stream are concentrated near the heart. There'd be enough there normally after death to hide the additional quantity."

"And it wouldn't show in the stomach content?"

"Possibly, but probably not. Taken in solution—in a drink—it would be absorbed rapidly. Probably fast enough so that death would occur within ten to twenty minutes. There'd be a trace left in the stomach, but a trace would be normal. And in any event, unless cream of tartar were the poison you were looking for, it would be one of the reagents used in testing for poison."

So that was it. But we couldn't prove it.

We found ourselves benches in the back of the coroner's court. He's J.P. too, and judge of Small Claims Court, so it really is a courtroom of sorts. My lack of popularity was highly apparent in the glare I got from the justice himself, from Biscayne who showed, and from Doc Waltham. I hadn't been wrong that I'd take a rap from those present.

Collins arrived breathless at the last moment, representing the Herald-Star. Fine. Just dandy. He waved and smiled in a deprecating manner, and I tossed him a grin that was a little pasty at the edges.

Patterson walked in, and then I really did feel like a heel. He looked normal and un-showy and good. I had to remind myself that he was a murderer.

The inquest was as usual. The hospital report; a report by Waltham on the post mortem. Patterson's report that he and Bean had quarreled—he said that—and then had a drink together, and were finishing up some business when the guy choked up and went out. They were getting ready for the verdict when I took my courage in both hands and stood up.

"It wasn't death by heart attack," I said loudly, looking at Patterson. "It was death by murder. I can't prove it, but I think I can offer sufficient evidence to show that it's highly probable."

Judge Sutter rapped with his gavel at that. From the look on his face I knew damned well that that evidence and that implication were not going to be allowed in that court room. I'd made a fool of Biscayne, his glare implied, but it wasn't going any further.

"Mr. Sands," he snorted, "if you have positive evidence of

murder, and I DO mean evidence, you have the court's permission to give it. But if you are talking through your hat, as I strongly suspect you are, it is immaterial, irrelevant and highly irregular, and I shall cite you for contempt of court if you continue."

So I was stopped. I kissed my job goodbye.

But to my amazement, Patterson spoke up.

"With the court's permission," he said, "I should like to hear what Mr. Sands has to say."

So I told the story again. I told them about the quarrel, and how I happened to listen to it, and about breaking into his office—I said breaking in to protect Julie—and about the cream of tartar and what Dave had said about the cream of tartar. And Patterson sat there, white about the lips but not moving, not trying to stop me.

When I finished there was a dead silence in the court. It was Patterson himself who broke it.

"Yes," he said quietly. "You are right, Mr. Sands. You are right on several points."

I didn't move or speak. I couldn't. The ground was shifting under me.

"The letter," Patterson went on. "I have it here. I can't read it to you, for it contains secret specifications, but it is an admission to the government that every one of the parts we have shipped them for the past four months has been defective through an error in our reading of the specifications. It is a defect that will not show up until the part has been in use for some hours, but then it would be fatal to a plane and its crew. We decided to admit our error, although the part would probably never be recognized as defective. That was the substance of our quarrel. Admitting our error meant that we should have to refund all the monies we had been paid for the parts, or remake all the parts. Either course would ruin the company. It meant ruin for the company, depression for the town, ruin for us—and the quarrel was a bitter one, and to—the finish."

He paused then, and the silence stretched so long it felt like a rubber band reaching the breaking point. But his voice, when he spoke again, didn't break the silence so much as underline it.

"My partner was not good at dissembling, Mr. Sands. And he was a highly vulnerable man in his—arrogance is a harsh word, but perhaps justified. A genius at manufacture, but arrogant. We all have our faults. I have had, before, to nurse him through blows to his arrogance, for a genius must be protected. And now that the letter was

written, now that the defective parts would be exposed, I was prepared to nurse him through this one, which I felt would be a major blow to him.

"When he mixed our drinks, I was feeling a little emotional. This is not a good thing to allow yourself in business, and by habit more than anything else, I cleared myself of emotion to look clearly at him.

"Mr. Sands—and, I beg your pardon, your Honor and the Court—when I looked, before I took the drink, I realized that my partner was not the defeated man I expected. He had sustained no blow. He had lost no battle. He had all the attributes of a man who has just won a battle. He was stimulated rather than defeated. And I have known my partner far too well to think he could have this reaction, if he felt that letter were going to be mailed. He knew it would not be mailed—but how he planned to destroy it I had no idea. I only knew that he was sure—very sure—that he was safe.

"There was no time to be careful, Mr. Sands. I struck out in the only way I knew to strike—at his achilles heel. My partner hated the public as you may know. He hated them, I believe, because he feared them. So I used his fear.

"I used your name, Mr. Sands, for which I apologize. I told him that I had confided the story in you and in our lawyer, but that your discretion was to be trusted—that the story would not be used so long as the planes and their crews were protected. I added, however, that if the measures I had suggested were not taken within the next twenty-four hours, the story would appear in print; probably in headlines. Undoubtedly in headlines.

"This time his reaction was such that I knew he had sustained defeat, that my battle, which I considered necessary to more people than himself, was won.

"It is not pleasant to watch a man take a blow of this sort. It is even less pleasant to watch him die. I watched both, Mr. Sands, and—" His voice broke. He put his face in his hands and a convulsive shudder ran through his body. No one in the court moved or spoke.

I wanted to say, it's okay. I wanted to say hell, relax, come on out and have a drink. It's easier to talk in a bar. But I wouldn't've. Murder isn't okay. A man that can murder isn't sentient. Not what I mean by sentient, anyhow. . . .

Then suddenly he was in control of himself again. His head

came up and his voice was calm. That practice of throwing away emotion was standing him in stead now.

"The really tragic part of the whole thing," he said, and his voice was clear and firm again, "the really tragic thing is that Emerson needn't have died. Last night I called the Air Force engineer in charge in Washington. My partner was dead, I could handle the matter in my own way, and I was afraid delay might be fatal to someone. I told them about the parts.

"They informed me that they had discovered a basic fault in the design of the section into which these fitted. The parts will never be used. We will not even have to remake them."

He stood there without moving. Then he continued as though it were an afterthought. "When I told my partner the story would break with me or without me, it was too much for him. He was a genius, but he had his weaknesses. He could neither face the public nor admit error.

"With that terrible expression of defeat on his face, he reached out as though blindly, took my drink from the table, drank it himself—and died.

"Yes, Mr. Sands, it was meant to be murder. I was the intended victim. But under the circumstances he chose to commit suicide."

A murderer was dead and his victim walked free. Julie and I stepped out into the sunlight and headed toward the open park. The morning was warm. The crowds seemed happy, carefree, not knowing how precariously their futures had balanced.

As we reached the open grassy space we turned back toward the courthouse. In the sunlight the statue of Justice seemed to smile at us. A shadow made her blindfold look slightly askew, but her scales were neatly balanced.

electronic detective

by Ted Klee

THE little girl had been raped and strangled. Her body had been found in a small wooded area a short distance from her home. Sheriff's detectives and uniformed patrolmen fan out through the neighborhood.

Questioning of every resident produces a description of one prospective suspect. He had been seen coming out of the woods that afternoon.

Back in his office, the sheriff goes into action. "Bob, get me the list of every sex offender we've booked during the last six years."

Bob dials a telephone number. "Stan, run off all sex offenders 5 feet 7 to 5 feet 11, blond, white, male, 40 years and under. I'll be right over".

Bob is back in 20 minutes with a printed list in duplicate. Quickly, all incarcerated prisoners are crossed off. The list is cut into six sections and six detectives are on their way to check out the possible suspects.

The electronic computer has

This article, describing a "first" in crime prevention, resulted from a conversation, this Memorial Day weekend, with Deputy Sheriff Edward T. Blodgett of Monroe County, at the home of SMM author Edward D. Hoch in Rochester. I felt certain that you would be as interested as I was in this development in criminal work. H.S.S.

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joined Sheriff Albert W. Skinner's Detective Division.

This is Skinner's 28th year as Sheriff of Monroe County, N.Y., with headquarters in Rochester. Use of the computer printer in criminal work is believed unique among Sheriffs of the United States. It has been in full operation only four months.

It would be nice to say that the electronic brain solved the slaying of the little girl. It didn't because the slayer had never been arrested in Monroe County. But, old-fashioned police work with around-the-clock questioning of every likely suspect did produce the slayer who was convicted and imprisoned.

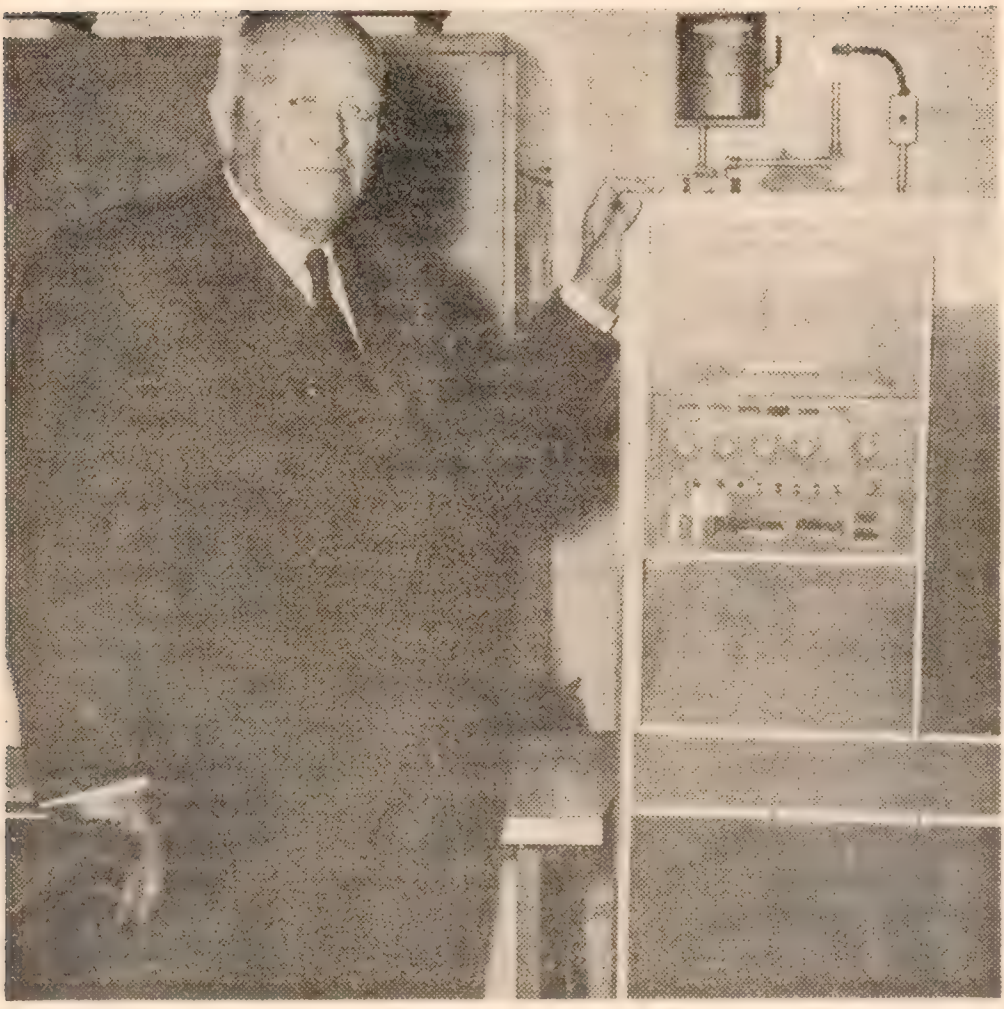
The above-mentioned Bob is Deputy Sheriff Robert G. Wilsey, who "fathered" the electronic detective. Stan is Stanley White, director of Monroe County's Data Processing Department. Their collaboration has cut the time of searching 20,000 punched cards for a list of suspects from six hours to ten minutes.

This story starts in 1958 when the Monroe County Sheriff's Department introduced the use of punch card data processing for the gathering of statistics on traffic accidents. For the previous twenty years it had been a laborious hand job.

In 1959 Deputy Wilsey was put in charge of a newly formed Data Processing and Statistical Division. He expanded the punch card operation to Monroe County Jail prisoner admissions. This was the beginning of what was to be six years of painstaking accumulation of data that would give birth to computerized detective work.

In the early stages, this data was used basically for a jail population report required by the New York State Correction Department. In the early 60's Deputy Wilsey realized the possibilities of a known criminal suspect file with the data he has been gathering. He added the Bertillon number of each prisoner to the punched cards. This number is the key to the individual's file in the Identification Division revealing his fingerprints, photographs and further personal history information.

Last year, Wilsey decided that a physical description of the individual would be an important part of the punched card system and he conferred with Deputy Edward T. Blodgett of the Identification Division. The result was adoption of the IDMO Code System which classifies persons in 324 numerical sequences with 64 subdivision numbers giving general breakdowns such as height, age, color of hair, and specific breakdowns for such things as tattoos, freckles, wrinkles, and facial scars.



Sheriff Albert W. Skinner of Monroe County next to a Processing Unit of the 1401 Computer System.

Late last year, Data Processors White and Wilsey discussed the feasibility of integrating the punched card system with the IBM 1401 computer.

White recorded the 20,000 cards on a master tape which can be updated and programmed to select and print a list of any suspects sought.

Computerized detective work was now at hand.

"The computer system is no solve-all," Deputy Wilsey emphasizes. "We are dealing with known criminals, but now we can account for them. If they all check out, we'll have to start looking for the unknown. What we're trying to do is to give the working detective a small group of persons to check out. He'll be dealing with a handful of individuals instead of hundreds."

The saint CROSSWORD

ACROSS

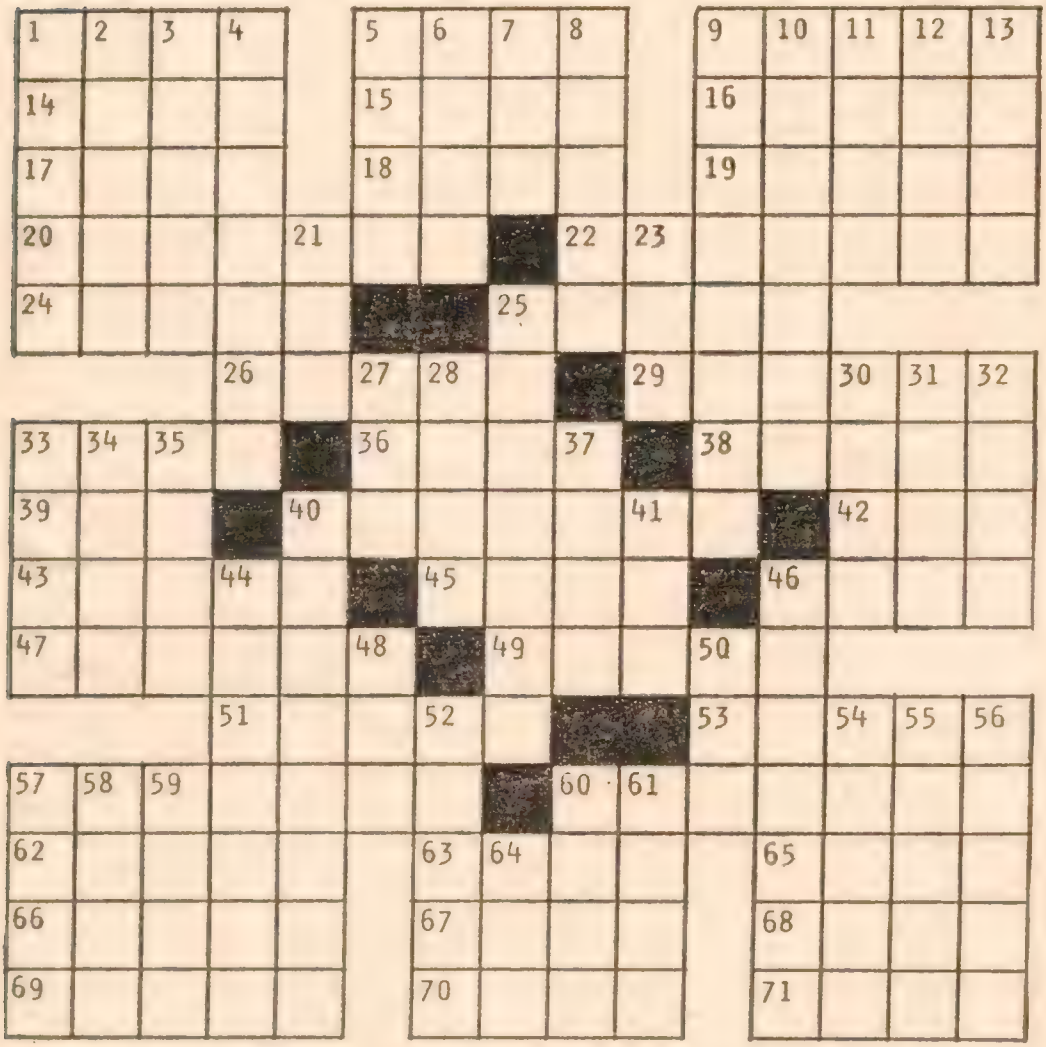
1: Yeggs crack it
5: Saints do it to devils
9: Confused composer
14: Lily, white
15: Spoken
16: Like sheep
17: Loud egg
18: Toe the party
19: In first, makes smoke
20: Irish isle
22: Loaded
24: Electronic finder
25: Far from fresh
26: Stop
29: Specific month in Brooklyn
33: Cain mixed his end
36: Game
38: Shop
39: Unfinished sign
40: Ideal
42: Tailless animal
43: Fast jobs are done in it
45: Row
46: Top banana
47: Pay no attention
49: Manner
51: Keep score on gun
53: Upright
57: Middle
60: Keyboard
62: Musical play
63: Dull pain
65: Do nothing
66: Turning point
67: Mournful noise
68: Ancient ax
69: Fish fur
70: Sailor's left
71: Greek cupid

DOWN

1: Spaniard's know
2: Smell
3: Smoked
4: Clasp
5: Plaything
6: Dry
7: Scooted
8: Vote for
9: Singer
10: Mountain
11: Fish
12: French handle
13: Musician's blow-piece
21: Backward period
23: Past having
25: Not altruistic
27: Improves good wine
28: Kind
30: Superlative
31: Space
32: Defines 27 down
33: Against
34: German mountain
35: Biblically girded
37: Dogs in slang
40: Speechify
41: May go with 67 across
44: Discipline
46: Maintenance
48: Consumed from the bottom
50: Upset beer
52: Fasten
54: Soft down
55: Big fiddle
56: Extra weight allowances
57: Robbers' bane
58: Saga
59: Russian river
60: Unfinished map
61: After Mardi Gras
64: Goes with bill

NOTE by the SUPERVISING EDITOR:

For the so-called clues to this puzzle I take full and sole responsibility. Most of them I supplied myself. As you should expect in a magazine like this, they are meant to be tricky, and difficult enough to keep such intelligent readers as ours occupied for more than a couple of minutes. But if you want to quibble with any of our solutions, don't ask us to explain or justify them. We are too busy thinking up meaner and sneakier ones for next month. — *L C*



(Please turn to page 149 for the solution.)

one of those days

by Henry Slesar

ALL those chucklesome misadventures in the comic strips, the blackened toast, the crumpled fender, the perilous banana peel in the driveway, seemed to plague Charlotte Beckwith during her tenure as a bride. After the first years of marriage, however, her husband Kenny made peace with the realization that Charlotte as a maturing housewife would be equally ten-thumbed, accident-prone, and ill-fortuned. He learned to live with it, being of amiable disposition, but he began to sigh a lot. And there were times when his own psychological pressures made him less than all-forgiving.

It was one of those times. Kenny, a sales promotion writer for a manufacturing firm, had discovered a new political mood in his company. The boss, Mr. George Lederer, had decided to make sweeping changes in his management team. So far, the changes hadn't affected Kenny, particularly his income which had stabilized two years. To augment it, Kenny had been ac-

It's funny as you read about it — but it isn't so funny if you have to live through a day like this — or a night . . . We are not suggesting that anything like this could happen to any of you, but you must agree that novelist Henry Slesar does tell a mighty convincing story . . .

cepting freelance promotional writing assignments, a form of moonlighting which Mr. Lederer would strongly disapprove. But Kenny needed the money. There was always a toaster to fix, a fender to uncrumple, a casualty insurance premium to pay.

What Charlotte later described as "probably my worst day" (one wonders what she meant by "probably") was a sunny day in early July. It began at two-thirty that afternoon when Kenny telephoned and said: "Charlotte? Listen, Lederer just walked in and said he could make it tonight on account of his wife's out of town and the guy he had a dinner date with had to fly to Oshkosh or someplace."

Charlotte comprehended nothing of this, so Kenny explained patiently.

"Don't you remember what I told you a couple of weeks ago? Lederer said he wouldn't mind coming to dinner sometime only he didn't know when. You know what that means around here these days, don't you? When the boss wants to come for dinner? Anyway, he's coming so we've got to make the best of it."

"He *can't* come tonight," Charlotte wailed. "Kenny, you know what we decided about tonight, that we'd eat Monday's chicken?"

"We'll have to do better than that. Buy a turkey or something, make those special potatoes of yours, where you scoop out the shell and fill 'em with sour cream and stuff."

"Kenny, it's almost three *o'clock,*" Charlotte whimpered. "I don't have *time.*"

"Do the best you can, honey. And oh, listen, Lederer said he'd be there around seven but I just might be a couple of minutes late. I've got to see Joe Frame about this nylon brochure and I might get held up. I'll be there soon as I can, but make some canapes or something so Lederer won't get edgy."

"You mean I'll have to see him *alone?*" Charlotte squealed. "Kenny, you just can't do that to me!"

"I'll probably be there in time, don't worry. But for God's sake, don't, *don't* say a word about where I *am.* Don't even mention Joe Frame to Lederer, if he knew I was doing a brochure for his number one competitor we can kiss our income goodby. You understand, Charlotte?"

"But Kenny," Charlotte sobbed. Kenny, however, had nothing more to say. Stifling a convulsion of tears, Charlotte hung up and made a hurried survey of her food stores. Fortunately, there was a steak in the freezer,

vegetables, and a supply of Idaho potatoes. Dinner seemed a soluble problem, but the thought of canapes panicked her; she had never made canapes in her life. She finally spread bits of sardine, tomato, and hardboiled eggs on Ritz crackers, covering each concoction with a cheese paste she found in the pantry.

The canapes took an hour of precious time, her specialty potatoes another hour, housecleaning, dressing, and cosmetic repair another two, leaving her a margin of thirty minutes before Lederer's expected arrival. It was only when she went into the kitchen to check on the progress of her potatoes that she realized she had forgotten to buy bread, that she had no dessert, no wine, no napkins, no sugar for coffee, and in fact, no coffee.

The supermarket was five minutes away; Charlotte knew she had no choice but to make the trip. Considering the state of her nerves and her past driving performance, it was remarkable that she negotiated the journey without incident. She got through the checkout counter in record time, and was on her way home, feeling a giddy sense of triumph, at ten minutes of seven.

There was a charming wild-rose covered fence in front of the Beckwith home that partially obstructed the view of the front driveway. When Charlotte made the turn, she smashed into the rear end of a Lincoln Continental which had just pulled in ahead of her. The Lincoln's trunk sustained a V-shaped dent, its right taillight was shattered, and its bumper was half-torn from the body.

Charlotte was stunned at first, and then indignant at the stranger who had parked unbidden in her driveway. But when the stranger emerged, shaken, white of face, and mumbling to himself, she realized that, of course, he must be Mr. Lederer. She ran up to him, babbling apologies.

"It's all right," he said charitably, but his voice was trembling. "It's all right, Mrs. Beckwith, really. Insured and all that, heh-heh. Is Kenny home yet?"

"No," Charlotte said, in even more of a quaver. "But he'll be here any minute. Please come in, Mr. Lederer, I'll bet you could use a drink."

"I'll bet I could," he said, with such a gallant display of cheerfulness that Charlotte might have admired him if she had been in a calmer condition. Once inside, she parked him on the sofa and went to fill his request for a martini. Charlotte couldn't have made a proper martini at the point of a gun, but Kenny always kept a pre-

pared mix in the cupboard. She poured some into a glass and brought the warm mix to him. Mr. Lederer sipped it; his eyes became enlarged and he made a gargling sound in his throat.

"Oh, dear," Charlotte said. "I guess I should have put an ice cube in it."

"No," he said hoarsely. "No, it's perfectly fine." But he put down the drink and reached for a cigarette. Charlotte quickly picked up the table lighter and shoved it in his general direction, flicking the wheel at the same time. A spurt of flame appeared and singed the tip of Mr. Lederer's nose. He yelped and covered the injury with his left hand.

"Oh, I'm so *sorry!*" Charlotte cried. "Oh, I've burned your nose!"

"It's all right, it's all right," Lederer said, pulling out a handkerchief.

"But your nose is all black! I'll get you some butter!"

"It's just soot, that's all," Lederer said.

"But I can smell it burning! It smells awful!"

"I don't think it's my nose, Mrs. Beckwith, I think it's something in the kitchen."

Charlotte was even more horror-stricken at this suggestion, and hurried off to see what had happened to her potatoes. True to her run of comic-strip misfortune, they were nothing more than shriveled lumps of coal. At least, her trip to the smoky kitchen made her recall the canapes, and she brought them to the living room where Lederer was sitting on the edge of his chair, looking as if he wanted to leave.

"It's almost seven-twenty," he said. "Is there anyplace you could call Kenny, Mrs. Beckwith?"

"I *can't* call him," she said helplessly. "Not when he's working. I'm sure he'll be home any second."

"Oh, but he's not working you know, he left the office."

"I know he's not working *there*. I mean, he had to see this man about the brochure he's writing. Mr. Frame."

The handkerchief fell away from Mr. Lederer's blackened nose. "Joe Frame? Kenny went to see Joe Frame?"

"He's doing this brochure for him, he does a *lot* of work for Mr. Frame. Kenny works so hard, you have no idea—" Suddenly, she recalled Kenny's warning, and gasped. "No, I didn't mean that!" she said desperately. "I didn't mean it, Mr. Lederer!"

"So he's writing for Joe Frame on the side? Well, that's nice to hear, Mrs. Beckwith, a very nice thing to be presented with!"

"Please!" she begged. "Don't

tell Kenny what I said, I never meant to tell you! It's my fault, he warned me—"

"Yes, I should think he would."

"Please, Mr. Lederer, please have a canape," Charlotte said, as if food might erase the memory of what she had said.

"That's very interesting news," Lederer said. "I'm certainly grateful to you, Mrs. Beckwith." He snatched a canape from the tray. "I just want you to know what I was considering for your husband. *Was.*"

"*Please* don't be angry at Kenny," Charlotte said, close to tears. "He was only trying to make some money, that's all."

"Sure," Lederer said, stuffing his mouth, "sure, I understand. We've got to look out for number one in this world, don't we? And *this* was who I was thinking of making *sales* manager. *This* is the gratitude you can expect!"

"Oh, please, please," Charlotte sobbed. "I didn't know what I was saying!"

Lederer turned to her as if to reply, but he said nothing. Instead, he disgorged a mouthful of canape, his eyes enormous and his cheeks suddenly bulging and crimson. The noises he made were terrible. *"Argh! Raff! Yech!"* they sounded like. Then he began to cough, a choking, sputtering cough that made him slide to the edge of the chair pillow; he fell off and plumped heavily to the carpet.

"What is it?" Charlotte screamed. "For God's sake, what's the matter with you?"

He clutched his throat and pointed to the tray of canapes, his tortured eyes staring an accusation. In a retrospective flash, Charlotte recalled transferring a salmon-colored roach paste from a damaged cardboard container to a small glass jar that had once contained preserves, and thinking at the time how much it resembled a cheddar cheese mix.

"A doctor!" she screamed, as if she had been the victim. "Get a doctor!"

Lederer was forcing himself to his feet, breathing easier after having rid his throat of the noxious canape. He staggered towards the door, muttering something about seeing Kenny in the morning. "No, no," Charlotte sobbed, "you can't go like this, Mr. Lederer, you can't!" She pulled at his arm, and he resisted feebly; Charlotte realized that his experience had made her his physical superior. She had to stop him, no matter what the method, so she pulled off one shoe and began hitting him over the head with it. She wasn't exactly sure what her plans

were, but she reasoned that if she could render him unconscious she might think of something. However, the shoe was too light, and all she succeeded in doing was making Mr. Lederer cringe and shout at her.

"Stop it, stop it, you crazy woman!" he shrieked. "Let me out of here! Let me out!"

It was obvious that things had just gone too far. So Charlotte, sobbing in her misery, picked up the brass candelabra that had been a wedding gift from her mother and brought it down with stunning force on Lederer's balding head. He stopped struggling when she did this, and dropped to the floor. She hit him again to make sure that he was dead, and therefore no further threat to her happy home. Then she dragged him to the cellar door and let his body roll down the wooden steps to the bottom.

Kenny came home ten minutes later.

"What happened?" he said blankly, looking around the empty living room. "Where's Mr. Lederer?"

Charlotte pulled him to the sofa. "Now listen, honey," she said, "I want to tell you something. Only promise you won't get mad."

INTERPOL AGAIN WARNS YOUNG GIRLS

You're adventurous (or you think you are) and you're young, and you want to get away from the town you've known all your life, but which now seems to be closing in on you, engulfing you. You see the ad, — *posts in night clubs after short training periods for girls or young women — experience unnecessary* — and it seems the answer to your prayer.

It isn't. The chances are that the ad has been placed by the syndicate of present-day white slavers seeking recruits for their operations. European girls are generally recruited to work in the Middle East and in North Africa, where the demand is the greatest. Fair types will be sent to countries where brunettes predominate, and Mediterranean (or Latin) types sent to northern countries.

Ads of this type have appeared in European newspapers, in the United States and in Canada. Interpol urges greater police control over contracts for work abroad, that hiring agents should be required to post a bond covering at least the woman's return passage, and that it be made a crime, by international agreement, "to recruit or hire women for jobs and for work which fosters or could foster prostitution outside the country where they habitually reside."

Or inside the country, too . . . .

party girl

by Joseph Commings

She first attracted his attention in an illustrated advertisement in a men's magazine. *Life-size party doll. Inflate her ego to the fabulous 42-22-40 proportions. Wig included. Blonde, brunette, or redhead. Send now for your own party playmate. Every man should have one. $40 postpaid.*

A midwestern address followed.

Feeling his excitement rising, Clarence Fleagle's dull eyes remained fixed on the ad. This was it! He had to have her!

He considered the price, his swimming head sobering for a moment. It was outside his spending range. He still had three payments to make on the vacuum cleaner and the gas bill was due.

Then he thought of his frigid wife who watched him like a warden waiting for him to make one suspicious move. He was no longer young. Soon he would be aging into ulcers and heart at-

Veteran novelist Joseph Commings returns with this haunting story of that dream world — that private garden of the mind — into which all too many people escape, seeking refuge from reality. If you invade — or even threaten — this sanctuary, you do so at your peril . . .

tacks. His mind was constantly dwelling on how to achieve sexual satisfaction.

None of the women he met paid any attention to him. And that was a pity. They didn't know how romantic he could be.

His gaze froze on the illustration of the party girl. Spellbinding curves. And they could be all his. Excitement surged in him again. To hell with the cost!

He went home and broke into his own private Christmas fund. He scraped together the $40. Although he had the money, he still had to plan each step carefully. The whole thing had to be accomplished without Martha knowing.

In the first place, he just couldn't send off for it and have a large package delivered to his door. Martha would stick her nose into it right away. He had to get hold of the box some other way. Thinking it out, he went to the post office and rented a box.

That done, he sent off a money order for the party doll. *His* girl, as he liked to think of her.

It took three weeks. By then, his nerves were jumping with wild anticipation. Then the postal clerk shoved the big pasteboard carton through the window at him.

He staggered out of the post office with it and up the hill to the dingy private house on Crescent. How was he going to get it into the house? Martha would have her eagle eyes on the door. She would be waiting for him. He was late already.

It was growing dark. He stumbled into the pathway beside the house. There was a pile of rubbish there, waiting to be picked up by the garbage truck. Inspired, he set his precious pasteboard box down amid the trash. He knew that the garbage collectors weren't due until eleven o'clock. If no one tampered with the box, it would remain there undisturbed till he had a chance to come out for it again later.

Sweating, he cast one last anxious backward glance at the box, then shuffled up the front steps to the door.

As he fumbled in with his key, a gaunt, sour-faced apparition launched itself at him along the front hall.

"Clarence! Where have you been? You're twenty minutes late! If you want cold suppers, just keep this up!"

Mumbling some excuse, he stumbled on toward the uninviting kitchen. The supper was cold and tasteless. But tonight it didn't bother him. He was strangely stimulated. He felt light-headed. *She* was here. *She* was waiting outside

After supper he sat chewing

his fingernails through the two endless hours of TV, against which Martha competed with her incessant chatter. When she wasn't gossiping, she was nagging.

At ten o'clock she got up, dropped her false teeth in a glass of water, and readied for bed. They slept in separate bedrooms. He said good-night to her and went into his own room, waiting with shivering impatience as he listened to her stirring around. It was almost eleven o'clock. Those garbage men might come along any minute and collect his treasure along with the rest of the rubbish. Damn her, wasn't she ever going to go to sleep?

At last all became quiet. Sneaking outside, he secured his big package and crept back in. Sweating at each creaking step, he went up the stairs to the attic. He had inherited this old house from his mother. Living here was cheap.

Martha never went to the attic much, except to store scrap away or to do spring cleaning. And it was still a long way from spring.

With the attic door locked, he risked turning on a dim electric light.

Opening the box, he took her out. She was quite long, all five feet six of her, but she was flattened out, with kinky arms and legs. At the back of her round bald head was an air valve. Amid the attic junk, he found an old bicycle pump. He screwed the nozzle on to the valve and anxiously began pumping air into her

His dilated eyes remained pinned as her fabulous figure became rounder and firmer with each wheezing stroke of the pump.

She reached her full burlesque-queen proportions.

He hastily got rid of the pump and fitted onto her bald head the wig of long blonde tresses.

Panting with passion, he stood her up. The pneumatic blonde remained standing alone on her firmly planted bare feet.

Gulping at his audacity, he leered at her nakedness. She was the embodiment of all the secret dreams of his lifetime. Then he reached into his dreams for her and caressed her. She had a solid, skin-soft feel that was real, real. At that moment he called her Jayne, for obvious reasons.

He pulled her up close to his own throbbing body. "Oh, baby, baby," he whispered. "You're mine, all mine!"

Her pretty face—long black eyelashes, small turned-up nose, very red lips—had a little smile on it. She seemed to be murmuring things back to him, intimate, exciting, sensual things.

Nearby was an old cot covered with an army blanket. He put Jayne on the cot and covered her with the blanket. The outline of her covered curves made her even more desirable. Undressing hastily, he crawled into the cot with her. He lay with her in his arms till morning.

He worked as head clerk in the shipping department of a large mail-order house called Klassy Klothes. The company manufactured for sale everything from bikinis to bridal gowns. Naturally any girl who wore one of these bikinis would, if she met the right guy, be a cinch to end up in one of the bridal gowns.

All day, as he packed boxes of glamorous clothes and shipped them out, his mind was on Jayne. "My gal can't stay naked," he thought over and over.

He had never committed a crime in his life. Now he was driven to it. He didn't think of it as much of a crime. More a helping of himself to what was due him. Klassy Klothes owed him plenty for all the sweat he had lost on them. They would never miss a few straying pairs of shoes and dresses.

First, he had to do the right thing by Jayne. That first night he had treated her like a little tramp, he thought with the smirk of a playboy. Now he had to marry her.

He checked through the catalogue and found the perfect bridal gown, complete with accessories. Faking shipping orders, which wasn't too difficult in his position, he packaged up the garments and shipped the parcel to himself at the postal box number.

And it was getting easier to slip the clandestine boxes into his house. Later that night, in the attic, she made the most beautiful bride he had ever laid eyes on. With her standing at his side, her sensational body sheathed in shimmering white, he murmured his vows and he could hear her murmuring hers back to him. She was his forever. She would never look at another man. No other man would ever see her.

He crushed her red flesh vinyl lips to his and took her to bed with him.

"My baby needs a new pair of shoes," he hummed to himself. At work, he helped himself to whatever he needed to dress up the fantasies that saturated his mind. More high heels, and sweaters, skirts, and dresses. He concealed all the stolen finery behind old clothes in the upstairs wardrobe.

He disliked deflating Jayne in the early morning, storing her away, and blowing her up again

each night. It wasted too much valuable time and energy. He longed to find her waiting for him in full bloom.

Inflated, she was as difficult to hide as a real body. If Martha ever came across Jayne standing upright in a musty closet, she might drop dead with fright. That was a grimly pleasant thought. Then he and Jayne would have the whole place to themselves. But he had to be sensible and find some other safer hiding place.

That night, fidgeting through a long dull TV show, his eyes rested speculatively on the old upright piano in the living room. It looked like a sarcophagus. Nobody ever played it. It hadn't been tuned in thirty years.

That, he thought, is the place!

Later, in the attic, he took a fantasy trip with Jayne to Waikiki Beach. She was dressed in his latest gift, a sexy sarong, and he made love to her. He wasn't getting much sleep these nights, but he sure had memories.

He stole down the dark stairs with her full-bodied in his arms. He gritted his teeth as he crept past Martha's bedroom door. Reaching the old piano, he lifted the lid. Then he carefully laid her in the coffin-like interior. She had that serene smile on her lips and her magnificent breasts rose in inviting peaks toward him. He smiled down at her. He hated to close the lid.

"Till tomorrow night," baby," he whispered.

Yes, darling, yes, she seemed to say.

Friday night he was eating his supper in glum silence with Martha. Unbeknownst to her, he thought, she was the third partner in a *menage de trois,* as he so aptly put it.

"Ma phoned me today," she said finally. "She's sick."

"That's too bad," he said. The old lady was on her last legs, he thought. "Hope it aint serious."

"A bad cough. She's all alone now that Pa's dead. I was thinking of taking care of her for a few days."

He felt a glow of anticipation. Her mother lived in the next town.

"While I was gone, Clarence, you'd have to fend for yourself."

"I know, love. But if you feel you've got to go, don't let me hold you back."

"I know I can trust—"

There was a long drawn-out hissing noise.

"Whats that?" she said.

He knew it came from the interior of the piano. He became sick at the thought of her going to investigate.

"Sounds like air escaping from an auto tire," he grinned weakly. "Out in the street."

"It seems to come from in here somewhere." She watched

him with the censorious zeal of a book burner.

"Oh, no. How could it be in here? Sounds are pretty deceiving."

"Maybe." She lowered her eyes to the fish cakes on her plate. "Well, as I was saying—"

He wasn't listening to her. All he could think about was that Jayne had sprung a slow leak.

Her leaky valve was easily repaired. She was her old bouncy self again by the time Martha left the house on Saturday morning.

In the doorway, her purse stuffed with cough remedies, she admonished him sternly: "Clarence, behave yourself!"

"I will, love," he answered meekly.

He saw her go down the street and wait for the bus and take off.

He made sure she was gone, really gone, then he ran to the piano and scooped Jayne out and danced with her in his arms.

One whole weekend. It was sheer heaven. He and Jayne had full run of every room. They had a ball.

Martha came back on Monday. And his love life returned to the secret trysts with Jayne at midnight in the attic, in a fever pitch of excitement.

It was a week later that Martha's behavior left him worried. Several times he caught her in different closets, pawing through things. Hearing him approach, she would back out quickly.

"What're you looking for?" he asked a bit sharply.

"Oh, nothing, Clarence," she replied with an embarrassed titter. She hurried away before he could say anything else.

It wasn't like her at all. He had never scared her off before. She had never had an embarrassed titter. She was up to something. Damn her, he thought, she's snooping. Could she possibly suspect? He would have to be even more careful with Jayne.

Two evenings later he came home on time. It had been raining all day and he dutifully wore his rubbers. His feet didn't make any sound in the front hall. Years of pussyfooting had made him walk quietly anyhow. He paused, listening.

Martha was talking on the wall telephone in the kitchen.

"Shirley," she was saying in a voice tense with excitement, "Shirley, you'd never believe it."

Shirley was one of her middle-aged girl friends.

Never believe what? Rigid, he waited for her to spill more.

"It's life-size and it's made of something like rubber. Every detail exact. Like a real human. How? You blow it up. With a bicycle pump. And, Shirley, I was stunned to learn that they

made such things."

He felt his belly shuddering and his knees turn to water. She found it. It was all over for him. She had found Jayne.

What could he do now?

She would denounce him. She would say he was crazy. She would tell everybody about him, just the way she was telling Shirley now. Everything would come out. A man who did things like that was a weirdo. What a laugh for the shipping department. It would come out that he had stolen all those clothes from the firm. He was a thief. They would arrest him and throw him in jail. That would kill him. He couldn't stand being in jail for even one week. Worst of all, they would take Jayne away from him. He wasn't going to give up Jayne.

He *could* do something.

Softly on his rubbers, he crept up behind Martha. Her back was to him, her ugly shoulders humped forward, spilling everything into the phone.

"Of course, through the mails. And this house is full of old closets that make wonderful hiding places—"

"Martha," he said in a low terrible voice.

She turned with a guilty start. "Oh, it's you!"

"Hang up," he said.

Terrified, she hung up. "I'll put supper on right—"

His hands on her throat choked her off. His fingers were strong from years of packing and shipping boxes. He squeezed down with his thumbs and her tongue and eyes stuck out and she went limp.

After all these henpecked years, he discovered that he was stronger than she was.

He lowered her to the shabby linoleum of the kitchen floor. Now there would be the increasing difficulty of trying to hide *two* bodies.

But Martha was dead. He had Jayne all to himself.

He would take Jayne out of the piano and put Martha in.

Glancing around the kitchen, his eyes fell on a magazine clipping on the shelf under the wall telephone. There was something vaguely familiar about it. He peered closer, reading the adveritsement with a shock.

Male party doll. Easily inflatable. Six feet tall and built like a handsome beach boy. Suntanned vinyl skin. The latest idea in fun playthings. Every woman should have one.

temperature normal

by Alexandra Hill

"You'll have to calm yourself, Mr. Adams," the young nurse said reprovingly. "Your arms are set perfectly, and you'll be well again in no time. — That is, unless you're going to worry yourself into a fever. If you keep yourself upset, no doctor on earth can make you well."

The City Attorney looked earnestly after the starched, efficient figure, as she moved about the room.

"I've never been a fearful man, Miss Maguire," he said, "for up to this time I've always been able to defend myself. But lying here with my arms in these — these sarcophagi —" and he tipped his handsome, greying head toward the casts, "doesn't make for self-confidence, somehow."

The nurse opened the wash cabinet, took out a cloth, moistened it, and wiped first the hot face, then the long, slender fingers, twitching at the ends of the casts.

"Well there won't be any need for you to defend yourself while

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We know very little about the author, a Californian, but feel certain that Miss Maguire is destined to join the ranks of those nurse-detectives whom we've in several instances met in this magazine. If there can be an anthology about doctors such as Drs. Coffey and Standish—why not nurses?

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you are at St. Mary's," she said soothingly. "All you have to do here is to keep calm and get well."

"I wish I could be sure of that," Mr. Adams replied quietly. "They tried to kill me and only managed to break my arms. They're not likely to let it go at that."

'Nonsense. They can't touch you here. Shall I give you a sedative?" She put her hand on the hypodermic apparatus on the wash stand. "That would make you nice and lazy."

"No. You can throw that needle away for all I'll use it. I want to know what's happening to me."

Maguire musingly rinsed the cloth and hung it again inside the cabinet. Then she stood gazing long and searchingly at the City Attorney.

"All right," she said. "We thought it might make you worse to know about this, but maybe it will make you better."

She crossed to the heavy swinging door, opened it, and said softly into the corridor, "Will you please come here for a moment?"

An enormous young man, topped with a stubby, rust-colored thatch of hair, appeared immediately. He came grinning and rolling a wad of gum rhythmically around in his mouth.

"Hello, boss," he said laconically. "How's tricks?"

The City Attorney raised his head. "My word! Kelly! Are you on guard out there?"

Kelly grinned. "Yep. Me and some others. One at each entrance and one under the window. Six-hour shifts night and day."

"Well!" Mr. Adams exclaimed. "I see I'll be able to get a little sleep after all." And he let his head drop luxuriously back into the pillows.

'You bet," said Kelly. "The pride of the city's looking after you."

The nurse nodded in a friendly way to dismiss the young man. He rolled his gum and cocked his eye smartly at her, and her brown eyes smiled, just a trifle, in return. Then she turned again to her patient.

"Feel better?"

"I feel wonderful!"

She turned the crank to raise the head of the bed a little. "I'm going now to get you some broth before you go to sleep." And then, smiling broadly, "Try to stay awake until I get back with it."

She nodded to Kelly, lounging on his tipped-back chair in the hallway, and again to the Mother Superior who was conversing with one of the nurses at the door to the linen room, and then turned down the left wing toward the elevator. She

heard the familiar clanking of ancient machinery which indicated that the carriage was ascending, and quickened her steps.

The elevator door opened and three people stepped out. At the same moment a nun rose from a chair in the sun room just beyond the elevator, and approached purposefully. She stepped quickly, her black robes kicking out before her, the wings of her head-gear shining crisp and white under the ceiling lights. Maguire waited to permit her to procede her into the elevator, but she marched straight by, her eyes — intense, burning eyes, set deep in a wonderfully rugged face — fixed straight ahead.

"Now who can that be?" murmured Maguire. "I never saw her here before. There's something strange —"

"Down?" suggested the waiting elevator boy.

"Paul," Maguire mused, her eyes still on the fast-retreating figure, "did you get a good look at that Sister?"

Paul blinked and shook his head.

"Well, she's *not* a nun!" And Maguire started swiftly down the hall.

She reached the cross-hall just in time to see the nun disappear into Mr. Adams' room. Kelly's hand, which was at half mast in the termination of a tardy salute, dropped when he saw the nurse running soundlessly toward him, and he leapt to his feet.

Maguire clutched his arm. "Stay here," she whispered. *"Don't come in."*

Silently she pushed the door open and stepped into the room.

Over the shoulder of the bending nun Mr. Adams' terrified, straning face was visible, two muscular hands about his throat. And beneath the black robes, lifted a little with the nun's bending, a man's shoes, soft-soled for swift and quiet work, were plain to be seen.

"Sister!" Maguire said suddenly.

The figure straightened abruptly, but did not turn.

What could she do? What could she say, to forestall this terrible thing? If she should call Kelly, the man, cornered, would be forced to finish what he had set out to do, by whatever violent means. No. It would have to be better than that. Her mind dashed frantically in every direction, seeking by blind luck to find the one way, which surely must exist.

Since obviously she had to say something, and quickly, she said, "Sister Agatha —"

There. That was better. But what now?

Then, in a sudden, clear flash,

she had it.

"Sister Agatha," she repeated distinctly, measuredly, her mind now sharp as a blade, running ahead to pick the words with care. "Sister Hortense orders that no one but the guard and myself are to remain in this room. The police have been warned that an attempt is to be made on Mr. Adams' life, and they are on their way here now in riot cars. The gangster may be somewhere in the hospital already, and anything can happen. — It's for your own protection."

For one long, bursting moment the nurse, the patient and the intruder were silent as death. Then the man in the soft-soled shoes turned and walked quickly from the room.

Outside in the corridor Kelly waited as long as he was able. In the minute since Maguire had passed through the doorway, he had stood, his hand on his gun and barely breathing, exactly where she had left him. His mind and muscles, trained for lighting action, could wait no longer. No matter what the nurse had said, he was going in.

But in the moment that he moved, the door burst open in his face and the nun confronted him, eyes dropping instantly to his hand and the ready gun. And over that face came a look of rage and hatred that never marred the pure serenity of a Sister of Mercy. Inside, Kelly had a flash of Maguire standing rigid, of Adams with his eyes staring.

For a moment he was not sure where he was needed most — in that room, or as an escort for the impossibly sinister nun who had side stepped to pass him. When the nun shot him a backward glance, and turned the corner almost at a run, he knew.

Maguire began to breathe again. She pushed the door open a crack, and saw that Kelly knew his duty.

"I thought you said I was safe," Mr. Adams rasped furiously.

Maguire leaned over the bed, her expert fingers moving gently to ascertain the extent of the injury in the bruises on his throat.

"Well, aren't you?" But her voice trembled. Hastily she opened the cabinet door for the wash cloth.

"I am, no thanks to the guards. My God, Miss Maguire, won't you please call the Department and get me some protection up here? You were magnificent. Simply magnificent. But they'll have to do better than to depend on a muscle-bound flat-foot like Kelly —"

Maguire's hand steadied as she bathed his face. "Try to lie

back, Mr. Adams —"

The loudspeaker sounded from the hall. "All Sisters report instantly to the office of the Mother Superior."

The two in the room listened tensely.

Mr. Adams said, "That means that Kelly didn't get him."

"At least it means he hasn't got away."

Maguire went to the window and looked down. The guard posted there was no longer lolling on his canvas chair, but stood twenty feet out from the building. He glanced up at the window, then moved a bit right, then retraced his steps and paced to the left, his eyes moving constantly from one part of the building to another, to the street beyond the trees—any place where his eyes caught movement.

Maguire turned again into the room. "They're watching. He's still in the building."

Sirens sounded, and riot cars raced into the driveway. Kelly *did* know his duty! Police leapt from the cars. Some added themselves to the outside guard, others entered.

Maguire began to wish that Kelly would come back and plant his considerable bulk once more in the hall. She opened the door and looked out. He was not there. Nobody at all was in the hall. She wondered whether she should make a barrier of the wash stand, but decided it would be only a temporary delay to anyone determined to come in, and would certainly alarm Mr. Adams further.

The loudspeaker spoke again. "Miss Maguire. Mother Superior's office. Immediately."

Mr. Adams turned his white face toward her.

"Don't worry," she said. "I'm not going." And then, to try to take Mr. Adams' mind from the intolerable waiting, "Did you know that man, Mr. Adams?"

"Clement Boni."

"Why does he want to hurt you?"

"Three of his friends have just changed address."

"The penitentiary?"

Mr. Adams nodded.

"Grim looking character."

"He is. And absolutely ruthless."

The loudspeaker sounded again. "Miss Maguire. Mother Superior's office. Immediately."

Maguire, keping herself between her patient and the door, ignored it.

"If he's ruthless he's a coward. I never saw a bully that wasn't a coward."

"I'm afraid this one isn't. At least it's a side of his character I've never been privileged to see."

"I suppose a man in your position—"

The door burst in, and Maguire, like a furious cat with its claws extended, wheeled and sprang.

The officer who fended her off looked incredulous. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Sorry," Maguire said briskly. "Where's Kelly? Would you please go and get him?"

"Go yourself," the officer said, with not unnatural acid. "He's downstairs. They want you too. I was sent for you."

"Then will you stay here please, and not leave the room for an instant unitl I get back?"

"Those are not my orders."

"I'm afraid they are."

They eyed each other.

Then the officer shrugged. "All right. But you'll have to answer for it."

"Good. Let nobody in. Nobody at all.—Unless it's Kelly coming to relieve you."

The hall outside the Mother Superior's office was milling with people—police officers, nurses, doctors, janitors, gardeners. Maguire made her away among them and into the room. Here were nuns, standing silent, but peering guardedly around the wings of their sisters' coifs, as though fearing to find there the face of a person committed to the taking of life, and not to its conserving.

Two police officers stood against the window, and one of them was Kelly. As Maguire caught her eye he shook his head dejectedly.

The Mother Superior sat calmly at her desk, Sister Hortense, the Administrator, beside her. A lieutenant, obviously in charge, stood at the other side.

"I've come," Maguire said quietly.

"You are tardy, Miss Maguire."

"With cause."

"We shall discuss that later. Miss Maguire, all the Sisters who are on duty in the building are here. No stranger has come to the attention of any of them. A police officer, a Mr. Kelly, says you apparently realized that the Sister who entered Mr. Adams' room was an impostor."

Maguire nodded.

"How were you able to recognize the deception?"

"Why simply," said Maguire, "this nun's habit was regulation except for one thing. Around her neck she wore no crucifix."

"Ah."

Kelly grinned in admiration.

But the lieutenant was shifting from one foot to the other, chafing at the delay.

"That's all very helpful, Mother," he said, "but may I suggest something?"

"Certainly."

"Item one: Boni is still in the building. Two: he'll get out as soon as he can. Kelly recognized

him; it's dangerous for him here. Three: he'll make a break for it in his disguise. If he shed it, he'd be even more vulnerable than he is now."

The Mother Superior nodded.

"Now," he went on, "suppose the hospital personnel goes back to work, simply keeping alert for the nun whose habit is incomplete, and going to the nearest officer for help if that nun is seen."

"Very good." She nodded at the nuns. "You may all resume your duties. Sister Hope, please tell those people who are in the hall what to do. Quietly. Don't let your voice carry."

The nuns filed silently out.

Maguire remained.

The lieutenant was going on, "I have assigned positions to my men, and while three of us search, they will leave what seem to be loopholes to draw Boni into risking a run for it. Of course the loopholes are bogus. The men outside have traps at all possible exits. Now can we get going?"

"Very good." She smiled broadly and said, "Get going."

Maguire spoke, and her voice was loud and clear. "May I please have Mr. Kelly?"

The Mother Superior raised her brows. "Certainly not. He's needed here. He *also* saw this person, you remember."

"Then may I keep the officer who is now in the room?"

The lieutenant answered her. "There won't be another attempt on Mr. Adams' life. The whole place is alerted, and he's perfectly aware of that."

"But somebody's got to be there."

The lieutenant smiled. "Don't worry. Your door will be well watched. And please send down the officer who is there now."

As she walked along the hall, Maguire entertained the unpleasant notion that she and Mr. Adams were serving as innocent, helpless lambs tethered out as lure for the tiger. She tried to comfort herself by thinking, "They know what they're doing." But she found small comfort. She knew that, for herself, she was willing to take any risk whatsoever, if it would insure catching the criminal. But to subject Mr. Adams to that risk was a different matter. And in any case, she found it strictly against nature to submit to being helpless.

The officer rose as she entered Mr. Adams' room.

"They want you downstairs."

"Not a single suspect to slap the handcuffs on while you were gone," he said witheringly, and went.

"Well?" Mr. Adams asked impatiently.

"The place is bristling."

"Are we going to have protection here, or aren't we?"

"In the hall," she said, trying to make it sound as though that were reasonable enough. "Do relax," she added softly. "Try to let down a little."

"Could you?" Mr. Adams countered grimly, and remained rigid as a board.

Maguire moved silently about the room; placed the chair the officer had occupied back in place, moved things around on the wash stand.

Mr. Adams turned his head to stare out at the sky. When he looked back he saw that Maguire was handling the hypodermic needle.

He said, glaring, "Miss Maguire, I will not submit—"

"For heaven's sake. You don't have to submit unless you want to. But I can leave it clean, can't I? It's here mainly in case you have trouble sleeping during the night. You can quarrel with Miss Jones about that. It's her shift."

There was a sudden pounding of running footsteps in the hall, and Maguire faced the door, electrified. *Two* people were running. Then there was the sound of a blow, and at the same moment a fundamental grunt, as though somebody had taken a hard one in the stomach.

Maguire pushed the door open a little, and peered through the crack. Two figures struggled there, each trying to subdue the other with one hand while attempting to reach his weapon with his other. It was Kelly on the floor, his right hand pulling furiously at the gun partly extracted from a holster reluctant to part with it. And the figure on top was hauling up its robes, hopelessly entangled in them, obviously attempting to get to his own weapon. As they thrashed about, it was plain Kelly was about to get the worst of it.

Maguire turned back into the room, snatched up the hypodermic needle, already fully assembled, the barrel filled, and pushed out the swinging door into the hall. Kelly and the intruder were still locked in their desperate embrace, writhing on the floor. Maguire danced around the thrashing arms and legs, seeking a suitable spot of bare flesh, hopping, leaping to avoid being tripped.

An available area of forearm came to view—the forearm with which Kelly was being strapped down. And, fortuitously, the vision of its owner was blocked off by the wings of a coif.

With a quick and sure gesture she darted in, knelt down, and plied the art she knew so well. The needle went in to the hilt, she pressed the plunger, then pulled the needle out.

The intruder turned startled

eyes in her direction, saw her standing triumphant while she flourished the brutal needle, and blanched.

"You see," she said kindly, "it didn't hurt a bit."

Kelly felt the vitality of his opponent suddenly lessen, and abandoning the attempt to extricate his gun, gave a sudden heave which put him on top. He sat astride his enemy and pinned his two arms to the floor.

Maguire ran to the cross-hall, whistled sharply, and beckoned to the two officers who appeared from their concealment in the deep doorways. As they ran past her she sang out after them, "It strikes me your loopholes are rather large."

But Kelly scarcely needed their help. The figure with his habit awry was already losing interest in the struggle.

When Maguire reached her door, she paused.

"You'd better take him to emergency for shock," she said mildly. "Tell the doctor that he's got sodium pentothal in him; strictly a regulation dose. If he dies, it will be of fright."

Mr. Adams, alone, helpless, auditory witness to strange thumpings and cries and shrill whistles, had beads of perspiration standing on his brow.

"You got him?"

"We did."

"Ah, thank heaven."

The door opened precipitately and Kelly flung himself in.

"Hey, what did you do to the guy? He took two steps and fell on his face."

Maguire surveyed him with her brows lifted. "Mr. Kelly, this is a hospital, and I'll thank you to enter quietly."

"Don't give me that, sweetheart," Kelly said exuberantly, and picking her up, whirled her madly around at the height of his head. "You and me have been to the wars together." Still whirling, he shouted at Adams, "Know what she did, boss?"

Mr. Adams nodded, smiling.

"Lord, what a woman!" Kelly said, and put her down. Then he was quiet, a new thought dawning. "That's it! Hey. Ever give a thought to coming down and joining the force?—I've got influence."

Maguire, straightening her clothes, smiled at him.

She shook her head, but her voice was warm and vibrant as she said, "Thank you, dear Kelly, very much indeed.—But I like it here."

Then she turned to Mr. Adams, and her face became intent.

"Now what was I about to do? Oh, yes. Kelly, would you mind staying with my patient while I get him some broth?"

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

Ellis Peters, who will be remembered for her DEATH AND THE JOYFUL WOMAN, FUNERAL OF FIGARO, etc etc., tells the story of Detective-Inspector George Felse's gradual involvement in two interlocking mysteries, in WHO LIES HERE? (Morrow, $3.95). The question is apt, because it is precisely this question which has to be asked repeatedly as Felse, diplomatically, ignores some local past-times, concerned only with identifying — and understanding — a killer. This is an unusually pleasant novel, with some characters whom you will remember and want to read about again. Don't miss this.

Philip Jones, THE MONTH OF THE PEARL (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50) has to do with the attempt to circumvent a killer whose assignment, an impersonal one, is to kill Alan Barclay. The assignment to kill Barclay is given to the killer, a professional, in Helsinki in February, known in Finnish as *Helmikuu,* "the month of the

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The writer, awarded the Mystery Writers of America 1963 Critics' Edgar, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. He was earlier, between 1945 and 1952, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club.

pearl". If he succeeds in this "professional engagement", he will be paid Twenty Thousand Pounds. But, as the messenger explains, if he should fail, then he may "possibly not leave the city, because of other considerations. . . ."

Australian novelist Philip Jones has lived in the cities where things happen to both Alan Barclay and to Brenda Malline, who only gradually comes to know just how involved she has been with what has happened to this man she had come to love.

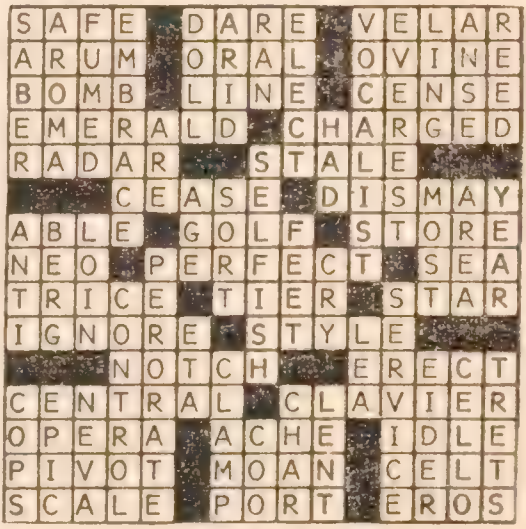
Excellent. Don't miss this!

Collier Books are to be thanked for reprinting both Charlotte Armstrong's THE INNOCENT FLOWER (Collier Books, 95 cents), MacDougal Duff's meeting with Taffy and what follows afterwards; and John Dickson Carr's classic Bencolin novel, THE CORPSE IN THE WAXWORKS (CB, 95 cents), which it was equally pleasant to read once more.

And I know many of you will share my pleasure at seeing Tecumseh Fox back in Rex Stout's BAD FOR BUSINESS (Pyramid Books, 50 cents).

Patrick O'Malley's THE AFFAIR OF THE BUMBLING BRITON (Mill-Morrow, $3.50), brings back Harrigan and Hoeffler, those decidedly unorthodox counterspionage agents, as they set out to find and to rescue James Beaufort-Balfe, a British secret agent considered to be "a combination of Sir Francis Drake, Lord Wellington, Kitchener of Khartoum, the Black Watch, Juan Fangio, Daniel Boone, and Casanova." This colleague of a rather publicised British agent—"His secret number is one of those double ought affairs," explains the Chief—has stumbled into the sort of situation which only Patrick O'Malley can adequately—and joyfully—describe. . . . If you liked, as I did, THE AFFAIR OF JOHN DONNE, this newest Harrigan and Hoeffler novel is a must! Don't miss it!

Answer to This Month's Puzzle



the riddle of the stone jars

by Philip Ketchum

ERV'S ACRES was just west of town, a small garden farm, wire fenced, but not kept in good condition. A third of it was still covered by trees and shrubbery, another third had been neglected. The rest of the place was given over to a house, a barn, several sheds and a chicken yard.

A generation ago when Erv Scott had farmed the place he had used all the cleared area, had worked from dawn until dusk, and he had made money. He had done very well, year after year, and had saved his money. At least, this was the legend. He had worked and worked, and saved and saved and saved. He did not trust the banks but converted his money into gold, stored it in stone jars, and buried it somewhere in the earth where it would be safer.

Erv died in the early days of the depression just after the local bank was closed. Some people around here lost a lot of money when the bank closed, but not Erv. His money was safe.

Philip Ketchum, as we have said before, is a contemporary of Cornell Woolrich, of George Harmon Coxe and of those others who came to the forefront in the old Black Mask days. Possibly better known in more recent years for his novels about the West, Mr. Ketchum is in North Carolina this summer, writing.

It could not have helped him a great deal for death caught up with him, and it is almost certain he had no chance to do anything about his gold.

People descended on his land almost before his body was cold. They came by day and by the dozens. They brought spades, shovels, picks. Some even brought lanterns so they could work by night. In about sixty hours they pockmarked the land, tore up the sheds and the barn, practically destroyed the house. They searched and searched and searched, but no one found any gold, and rather abruptly the sheriff had an awakening of his conscience and put an end to the hunt. He sent the invaders away, posted guards to keep them away, and awaited word from Erv's relatives.

One relative showed up, a brother, John Scott. He took over the farm and ran it for twenty years. It seemed possible that during this period he might have found the stone jars, but if he did he failed to put the money back into circulation. It seemed he barely made a living, and in 1953 he died, almost broke.

He left the property, Erv's Acres, to a married and widowed daughter, Mrs. Maude Hinson. No one even knew he had a daughter but it seemed he did, and in due time she came to look at the farm and decided to stay. For several years, then, she worked the place. She probably made little money but seemed to get along. In the early 1960's she hired a local woman to help her, Ella Mae Kruger.

Maude Hinson was a dour, unpleasant woman. She was about fifty, short but heavy, active and aggressive. Her voice was harsh. She had long, stringy, black hair. Ella Mae was quite different, thirty-five, tall, thin, wiry, and not at all attractive. She had been married but deserted by her husband. She was bitter and nervous, jittery.

No one who knew them thought Maude and Ella Mae would be able to get along. It seemed inevitable that they should fight. Possibly they did. But a year passed and another, and they lived together. Sometimes both worked in the fields, sometimes only Maude for Ella Mae did not seem very strong. They stayed home, seldom went out. Now and then a venturesome person would invade Erv's Acres, usually by night, searching for the still missing gold, but that was a risky thing to do. Maude had an old shotgun and she knew how to use it. She kept it loaded with bird-shot.

In the fall of 1964, Ella Mae fell ill. It was nothing serious, a bad cold, but it persisted, and in the following spring she was unable to help with the work in

the fields. As a result of this, Maude hired a man. This rather startled the community. The thought of two single women hiring a man seemed wrong, questionable, possibly immoral. But to think about it again, the man was in most danger. Maude and Ella Mae were rather impossible people. Why a man would ever want to work for them was hard to understand.

Henry Vaile, the man who went to work for them, was about forty-five. He had been married but his wife was dead. He had been a farmer who had lost his land, a rather large man, thick-bodied, gruff, and not a man to do much talking. People said he had been a good worker, a steady kind of person.

Henry did not think of himself as being steady. He did not think of himself as being frustrated, disappointed, desperate, but he was. The good things of life had escaped him. He was getting no younger, he had saved no money. He knew, realistically, that he would earn very little from Maude Hinson. But if he worked here he was at least on the scene of a fortune. Erv's stone jars had never been found. While he worked for Maude he could do a little searching on the side. And he would.

As long as he could remember he had heard of the hidden gold. No one knew how much it amounted to. Some said that Erv had filled nine stone jars, that all the money was in double-eagles. If that was true, if every stone jar was fair-sized, and was filled, the nine stone jars might hold a hundred thousand dollars. If he found only one, it might contain ten thousand dollars. Not a bad find. A man could do a lot of things with ten thousand dollars. Of course, the gold might have been found but the records failed to show it. If there had ever been a fortune, there was a good chance it had never been uncovered. He might never find it, but then he might. The search was worth it.

Maude told him what to do. "I want the fields plowed and harrowed. It's not too late for a good crop. Then, I want the old well filled in. You can do that in your spare time. I want the chicken house torn down and the chicken yard plowed. We'll put a garden there. It's close to the house, convenient."

"Yes, ma'am," Henry said, and he frowned. "I'll have to take a little time to fix my quarters."

Maude nodded. "Yes, I suppose that has to be done. Will you use one of the sheds?"

"I might, or I might fix a place in the barn."

"Suit yourself, but work comes first."

"I'll do my work," Henry said.

This conversation was in the

kitchen, in the early morning. Maude was dressed in overalls and a man's shirt, a short, solid-sized woman. She looked very competent. Ella Mae Kruger was still in her nightgown and bathrobe, thin, tired looking, her face almost colorless. She seemed hardly alive.

"Guess I better get to work," Henry said.

"Huh!" Maude nodded.

Ella Mae said nothing.

Henry got busy, plowing. He kept at it all morning and half of the afternoon. Then he disappeared in one of the sheds. There he did some digging. He would go on digging after dark.

He had set up no priority as to where to start. He knew, from rumor, that the sheds, the barn, and the house had been well searched, years ago. That might have been true, but at the same time, the search might not have been complete. Whatever he did he would do thoroughly. The buildings, the old well, even the fields. Someday when Maude and Ella Mae were away he would get into the basement of the house. This would involve a lot of hard work but he did not mind it.

A week passed, and another, and another. A good part of the day he worked in the fields but he saved part of each day for the search. He told Maude he was spending this time in his quarters, getting it livable. Maybe she believed it.

Another week passed. By this time Henry was busy, building a narrow, thirty foot ladder. This was to be used in the old well. He had plumbed it. A thirty foot ladder would reach to the bottom but would be below the covering of the well. He was interested in what he might find behind the walls of the well. It had occurred to him that maybe no one had ever looked behind the brick walls. What a perfect hiding place!

Maude found him building the ladder, and she asked, "What's that for?"

"Thought it might be handy." He managed to shrug.

"We've got a ladder in the tool shed."

"It's not much good."

"Good enough," Maude said. "We've got more seed potatoes."

'Where do you want me to put them?"

"You didn't plow all the chicken yard. Run about four rows toward the house. Do it tomorrow, early. I'll do the seeding."

"In the morning, early," Henry said.

He never argued with her. Or with Ella Mae. She seldom said anything but she startled him that night when he came to the porch for supper. She was sitting out there, well wrapped up even

though it was warm. Maude was in the kitchen.

Ella Mae spoke in almost a whisper. "Maude told me about the ladder. You won't find the gold in the well."

He gave the woman a quick look, then looked away.

"Maude searched the wall, long ago," Ella Mae said.

"In eight feet of water?" Henry said.

"Last year was a dry year. The well went almost dry."

He scowled and was silent, but he thought, *Sure, she searched the well. But did she look behind the brick walls? Did anyone ever look there?* He was actually excited. Some night next week he would start tearing down the brick walls of the old well.

Maude owned a small tractor plow and the next morning he put four more rows along the edge of the chicken yard area. He was cutting the last furrow when the plow turned out a fairly large dust encrusted object. It might have been a rock, an old piece of iron, a chunk of cement—or a dirt covered stone jar. He stopped the tractor, swung to the ground, dropped on his knees, and started examining what he had found. He was suddenly perspiring, shaky. This was no rock, piece of iron, or a mere chunk of cement. It was a stone jar, the top wired down. He tore the wires away, opened the top—and gasped. Here was a treasure—or at least part of it. Gold coins, large ones, double-eagles. The jar was filled to the top. Right in his hands he might have been holding ten thousand dollars.

A voice spoke from above his shoulder, the voice of Maude Hinson. "So we've turned up one of the stone jars. I'll take it."

He turned half around, looked up at her. She must have been watching from the house, must have guessed what he had found. This was a bad stroke of luck, but what of it. He shook his head definitely. "I found it. It's mine."

"This is my land," Maude said. "Whatever you dig out of it, is mine."

"Not this jar."

"But it is. It is one of Erv's jars. And it's mine."

Henry was still on his knees. He was not holding the jar for it was heavy. But he was crouching above it protectively. He had found it. It was his. At this very moment he would have fought for it.

Maude spoke again, her voice sharp. "This is my land. You have found one of Erv's stone jars. The contents belong to me. Every court in the land would agree with me."

That was a sound argument. Henry knew it. He had found it,

but this was one of Erv's stone jars. He had no right to claim it. If he went to court he would lose. And if the court got interested a good part of the money might be claimed in taxes. He did not want to get involved with the court. He did not want to get involved with Maude either, but here she was, not three feet away.

She spoke again. "Try anything, and Ella Mae will telephone the sheriff. She is watching from the window."

He glanced toward the house. Maude was right that Ella Mae was watching. He knew about the gold, Maude knew about it, Ella Mae knew about it. He—and two women. If he could handle them without any trouble—but that might be a problem. He had found the gold at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

"I probably owe you something," Maude said. "Ten percent."

Henry moistened his lips. "I want half."

"Ten percent, or nothing."

"Half," Henry said.

"Half of this,' Maude said, "if you'll help find the others. I know there was more than one. The others may be nearby. Another furrow, and who knows what we'll find?"

Henry got to his feet. He had found one of the stone jars. If he did a little more plowing he might find another stone jar—or even several more. Maybe all of them. Nine stone jars filled with gold. A hundred thousand dollars in gold! Half a jar for him? Never! He would take it all. Why should he worry about two women?

"Carry this to the house," Maude said. "Then try the next furrow. You'll get your share."

Henry smiled, but only to himself. What was required, right now, was cleverness. He would seem to agree. That was important. He wanted no trouble until he had uncovered the rest of the treasure. After the other stone jars had been found he would figure out what to do about Maude and Ella Mae. There was really no hurry about getting rid of them—if that was necessary.

The stone jar filled with gold was quite heavy but Henry carried it into the house. Then he went outside, started the tractor again. He plowed nearer and nearer to the house. In the next hour he uncovered three more stone jars, each filled with gold. Toward dusk another was found. Five stone jars. Five of the rumored nine.

That night, in the house, Henry and Maude counted the gold coins. The amount came to over thirty-three thousand dollars. Thirty-three thousand dol-

lars! A very respectable amount of money—even if they found no more.

Henry sat back from the table, glanced at Maude. The gold from the last jar was still on the table. In Maude's eyes was a bright, glistening look. The tip of her tongue reached out to moisten her lips, dry, thin lips. Henry nodded to himself. He could easily guess what she was thinking. She wanted it all, every dollar. She meant to keep it herself. And Ella Mae— He was amazed by the way she was breathing—panting. Her eyes were as bright as Maude's. It hit him abruptly that Ella Mae was as greedy as Maude. She would have been glad to take it all.

Maude spoke under her breath. "In the morning we'll plow the land on the other side of the house. That's where we'll find the other four jars."

"Yes, that's where they might be," Henry said.

The five jars they had found had been close to the house. If there were any more they would probably be nearby. At least, this seemed reasonable.

"Where'll we keep it tonight?" he asked slowly.

"In my room," Maude did not hesitate for a moment.

"Half is mine," he said bluntly.

"You'll get your share." Her eyes were still sharp, glistening. Her body was tense.

"Don't I get any?" Ella Mae asked, her voice hoarse.

Maude frowned, but nodded. "You will get your share, Ella Mae, You must trust me."

"A third," Ella Mae said, and she was twisting her hands together. "I think we should each get a third."

"We'll work it out in the morning," Maude said. "It's time for you to go to bed."

"I—I guess I do," Ella Mae said, and she stood up, looked at the gold on the table, and took a shaky breath. She started to speak again, but changed her mind and left the kitchen.

"No reason for you to stay, Henry," Maude said bluntly.

She was right about that. There was no point in sitting up all night in the kitchen. He had to trust her until they found the other stone jars—or until he figured out what to do with her. He needed to do some sober thinking and he had to do it tonight. If he waited too long——

"See you in the morning," he said gruffly, and he got up and turned toward the door.

He had fixed a room in a corner of the barn and he slept there that night but it took a long time to get to fall asleep. And he slept very poorly. He kept waking up, and toward morning he thought he heard

sounds from the house and he got up, walked to the door, and peered through the darkness. There was nothing he could see. The house was dark, silent. He waited restlessly until dawn, and he did a lot of thinking. He thought he could be sure of one thing. The fortune he had found would never cut into thirds, and it would never be halved. Maude wanted it all. Ella Mae would have taken it all. So far as he was concerned, it was going to be his. If that was the way things stood, he was going to have to be very careful this morning, watchful, sensitive to what was happening. And his chief problem was going to be Maude. Poor, fragile Ella Mae had no chance at all. He could almost forget her, but not Maude. She was a formidable person.

Breakfast was almost as usual. Maude rang the breakfast bell soon after sunup. He ate with her in the kitchen and while the coffee was bitter and too strong, he did not worry that she had put anything into it. Maude was greedy. She wanted the rest of the fortune. She had never learned to handle the tractor. He was needed this morning to finish the plowing in the hopes of finding the remaining four stone jars.

Ella Mae appeared for breakfast. Pale, silent, and in her bathrobe. She said nothing.

"Ready to get to the plowing?" Maude asked as he was finishing his breakfast.

He nodded. "Just about. I reckon nothing has happened to the gold."

"It's safe enough, locked in my clothes closet."

Henry stood up. He thought it wise to make a firm statement. "I hope we're not going to have any trouble, Maude. Half of the gold is mine."

She frowned. "What about Ella Mae?"

"Set aside what she needs, then we'll split the rest. Is that fair."

"Yes. That's fair."

Ella Mae took a long, slow breath. She looked at Maude then looked away, and spoke almost under her breath. "I'll never get any of it."

"Of course you will," Maude said. "Don't be silly."

"Guess I'll start plowing," Henry said.

He got up, headed for the door, went outside, and he was thinking, *I won't have to worry about Ella Mae. She's got no spirit. But what am I going to do about Maude? I gotta keep on my toes every minute.*

He worked all morning, plowing near the other side of the house. Maude stayed right with

him, walking the each furrow. But they found no more stone jars. They tried the yard at the rear of the house, but without any success. Toward noon he stopped the tractor and walked to the back porch, to the water cooler. Maude had gone inside to start dinner.

As he was finishing a cup of water, Ella Mae spoke to him from the kitchen door. Her voice was low. "I won't get any of the money, but neither will you. Maude will take it all."

He looked toward the door. "Where is she?"

"She's gone to her room."

"Why won't I get any of the gold?"

"Maude reloaded the shotgun this morning. She took out the bird-shot. The shells she put in would blast you in half. She can always tell the sheriff she thought you were a prowler."

Henry moistened his lips. "Where does she keep the shotgun?"

"In her room," Ella Mae answered. "Maybe she's gone after it. When she comes out——"

Things were moving faster than he had expected. It was true that they had found nothing this morning but there was still more plowing to be done. Of course, if Maude had decided they would find no more stone jars——

He realized abruptly that he was perspiring. He was breathing faster. And he felt shaky. If Maude came out with her shotgun——

"This might be your last chance," Ella Mae said. "Don't you have a wrench in your pocket?"

He did. In his back pocket. He made sure it was there but a wrench was a poor match to a loaded shotgun. He might never get to use it.

"I'll move away from the door," Ella Mae said. "When Maude comes back she'll walk to the backporch to see what you're doing. If I scream, she'll turn around. And if you're quick enough—— Here she comes!"

There was suddenly no time to think. Ella Mae had offered him a plan. It might work if he did not hesitate for a moment. It might work if——

Maude appeared suddenly in the door, and she was carrying the shotgun but at least she was not pointing it at him. She could —in an instant, if she wanted to. And unless Ella Mae screamed—

"Didn't hear the tractor," Maude said. "Thought there might be some kind of trouble."

"Just stopped for a drink," Henry said. "I wish——"

He broke off what he was saying. Inside the house somewhere, Ella Mae had screamed. It was a high-pitched scream, weighted with terror. Maude

twisted around, looking toward the sound. She did this just as Ella Mae had predicted. And Henry did as she had suggested. He stepped toward Maude, reached for the wrench, raised it and then brought it down. It crashed against Maude's skull. She slumped to the floor without making a sound. She would never make a sound. She was dead.

Henry examined her briefly. It surprised him how shaky he felt. He was a little sick, too. He reminded himself that this could not have been avoided. It had been him or Maude, and in a contest like that, he had to be on his own side.

Ella Mae was across the kitchen, watching. Pale, wide-eyed, breathing too fast. Her voice was a whisper. "Is she—is she——"

Henry stood up, nodded. He made a gruff comment. "It had to be done. No way to avoid it."

"And the gold?"

He looked at her. "We'll split it up. You and me."

"You promise me?"

"Sure."

It was easy to agree. Ella Mae would never be a problem. He could push her over with one finger.

"What about—Maude?"

"We'll wait until it's dark," Henry said. "Then—the old well." And he thought suddenly, *I'll have Ella Mae help me. We'll put Maude there, and it's a perfect place for her, too. Perfect. An easy push, and Ella Mae will be gone.* It was an almost brilliant plan.

"I—you meant it, didn't you?" Ella Mae said. "You'll give me half of the gold."

He grinned at her. "Sure. Why not?"

"I—I feel a little shaky."

"No reason to feel shaky."

She looked around the room. Her eyes were bright, almost feverish. And she was tense as well as shaky. "I—when I get shaky I take a little brandy. Maybe you'd like some brandy?"

"Brandy?" Henry said.

"It's very good brandy."

Henry was thinking swiftly. Ella Mae was a frail person. She probably could not have used the shotgun, or a wrench. But she could use poison. That would fit her perfectly. Right now, most likely, the brandy was poisoned. Or he would find it in his coffee or in his food. He had to remember what he had sensed last night—that she wanted it all, just as Maude, just as him. She was not very strong but she was still dangerous. Clever, too. She was the one who had set up Maude's death. Until she was out of the way——

"I'll get the brandy," Ella Mae said. "It's on the shelf."

She walked toward the kitchen cabinet. Henry drifted that way too. When she reached the cabinet she had to turn her back to him, open the cabinet, and reach up for the brandy. This gave Henry all the chance he needed. He moved up behind her, reached for his wrench again, raised it and whipped it down. Ella Maes skull was no harder than Maude's. She died almost instantly.

He looked away, took a deep, steadying breath. His problems were almost over. He had to dispose of two bodies, pick up the gold, and move out, and he would be wise if he moved out quickly. In a few days, at most, the neighbors would be wondering what had happened to Maude and Ella Mae, and an investigation would be under way. By then, he should be thousands of miles away.

He turned away and walked to Maude's room to take a look at the stone jars and the treasure inside. The jars were not in sight. They were not in the closet, where Maude had said she put them. They were not in any of the drawers, in the trunk, or under the bed. They seemed to have disappeared.

He searched the room again. He searched every room in the house. He searched the attic, the basement. He did this again, now feeling almost desperate. What had happened to the stone jars? What had happened to the gold? Where was it hidden?

He started searching the house again and in Ella Mae's room he noticed a diary. The last entry was dated this morning. It read: *Maude spent much of the night, carrying the stone jars outside somewhere, and hiding them, and the treasure. She told me she was returning the stone jars to the earth, where it would be safe for us. She meant safe for her, for she means to give me nothing. But I will fool her, for I followed her, and I know the hiding place.*

Henry read the entry again. He turned away, walked outside, looked around. He was back to where he had started. Somewhere in this area of land were five stone jars, well filled with gold. Erv had buried them once, and it had been three generations before they were uncovered. Maude might have hidden them just as well. If he had time to search all of Erv's Acres he might find them again—but if he stayed here the disappearance of Maude and Ella Mae would bring on an investigation—and a hangsman noose for him. If he was smart he would leave right away.

For a short time he had brushed up against a fortune, but that was as close as he came. Erv's stone jars had been returned to the earth.

(Continued from Other Side)

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